

CELEBRATING TWENTY FIVE YEARS



Northern Berkshire Community Coalition



Northern Berkshire Community Coalition

*Thanks to our underwriters who made  
this anniversary journal possible:*

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Northern Berkshire Community Coalition**

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**South Adams Savings Bank**

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Northern Berkshire Community Coalition

For the past twenty-five years, I have been honored to be associated with the Northern Berkshire Community Coalition. As an organization, we are much different from what we started as, and our changes are a reflection of the evolution of the Northern Berkshire community. What I continue to enjoy about my association with the Coalition is the view I have as the Northern Berkshire community grows and matures. The view is one of the best, almost as if I could see from Mount Greylock. Not only have I been able to watch change at varying levels but I have seen the change come about in different seasons. I see change from the viewpoint of the leaders of the faith and political communities, through the eyes of our youth, our aging residents and others.



Twenty-five years seem to have passed quickly. When the Northern Berkshire Health and Human Services Coalition began, Ronald Reagan was President, Haley's Comet was a sight to behold in the skies, the Mir Space Station was launched, Iran and Iraq were at war with each other and South Africa was under increasing pressure to change its apartheid system. We're a different world today and just as the world has changed, the Northern Berkshire Health and Human Services Coalition has advanced to become the Northern Berkshire Community Coalition of today.

We have moved from a forum for health and human service providers to a forum for community issues. Our Community Coalition has worked with neighborhood leaders to foster dialogue at the most important level, within our neighborhoods. We have worked to create a noncompetitive forum for the youth of our communities through UNITY. We continue to focus on prevention of social problems, whether they are maltreatment of children, chronic health issues linked to obesity, or substance abuse. And we continue to support the area services to do the best job they can.

This anniversary journal marries our journal of the first twenty years with our last five years as an organization. Like all stories, it is shared through the eyes of the writers, and, along with myself, there have been many who have contributed to the telling of our twenty-five year history. This journal is not the definitive history of the Coalition, and some who read these stories will have memories that are not included. Let's view this publication as one piece of the Northern Berkshire Community Coalition legacy—a piece that has been written down and will mingle with other stories that will continue with the next generation of leaders and participants who take the reins of the Northern Berkshire community.

Compiling this journal has been a remarkable opportunity for reflection on twenty-five years as a community organization. It has brought together many of us who have been with the Coalition since its early days and has offered more recent Coalitioners a better understanding of where we are today through stories of where we were. I hope that this journal will help you understand how the Northern Berkshire Community Coalition arrived, and its continuing importance and impact on today's local community.

*Enjoy the reading. Stay involved with the Northern Berkshire community.*

*And take part in the Northern Berkshire Community Coalition in whatever way you can.*

Al Bashevkin

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Al Bashevkin". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Executive Director

1986-2011

# Our Mission

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

## In pursuit of this mission, we emphasize the following:

- Strengthening neighborhoods and community life
- Preventing alcohol and substance abuse
- Fostering economic development
- Mitigating poverty
- Supporting positive youth development
- Building bridges between residents and service agencies

# Programs

## Coalition Core

The Coalition brings local organizations and community leaders together to address local issues. Activities include monthly forums, a monthly newsletter and weekly e-Zine. The Coalition works to prevent health and social problems with a variety of programs including nb21 (substance abuse prevention) and Mass in Motion (better health through active living and healthy nutrition).

## Northern Berkshire Neighbors

Building stronger neighborhoods with stronger local leaders is the focus of Northern Berkshire Neighbors (NBN). Seeking to create the social conditions in our neighborhoods necessary for the health of the people, NBN works collaboratively with residents and area organizations.

## The Family Place

Providing holistic, integrated support services and activities to northern Berkshire families with children prenatal through age 12.

## UNITY

Led by an adult advisor and student-led planning committees, UNITY (United, Neighboring, Interdependent, Trusted Youth) organizes a variety of programs to promote the empowerment, education, involvement and support of youth.

# Content

nbCC 2012 Board of Directors- .....	2	The Guardian Project.....	22
Twenty-five Years of Changing Northern Berkshire.....	2	Ensuring Access to Health Care .....	23
nbCC 2012 Staff.....	3	Supporting Community Projects .....	25
Our Community—Facing Challenges .....	4	Coalition Works to Build a More Peaceful Community .....	26
Genesis—Vignettes from the Start of nbCC.....	6	Endeavors by and for Ordinary People.....	29
Humble Beginnings— Finding a Home for the Coalition.....	6	Standing on Our Own Two Feet .....	32
Monthly Forums at the Heart of the Coalition .....	7	Strengthening the Transportation Infrastructure .....	32
Getting the Word Out to the Community .....	9	Strengthening Traditions in Our Neighborhoods .....	33
Building the Consensus for a Homeless Shelter .....	11	Strengthening the Network.....	35
Transitioning Into Our Neighborhoods.....	12	Serving as a Model for Others.....	36
From One to Many and Still Growing – Neighborhood Development.....	13	The Changing Face of Our Community .....	38
Transforming Into a Community Coalition .....	15	Using Community Organizing as a Technique to Curb Underage Drinking .....	39
Having the “Ah-ha” Experience Collectively .....	15	Positive Results Seen in Underage Drinking and Smoking.....	40
Building the Consensus— a Focus on Youth.....	17	NBIAI Friendship Center Food Pantry .....	41
UNITY.....	18	Finding New Ways to Reach Out: Community Outreach Workers .....	42
Groove .....	21	Strengthening Northern Berkshire Families.....	<i>Inside Back Cover</i>



## **The Northern Berkshire Community Coalition**

### **2012 BOARD OF DIRECTORS**

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*President*

Suzy Helme  
*Vice-President*

Al Nelson  
*Treasurer*

Steve Green  
*Clerk*

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John Law

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Stephen Sheppard

Geraldine Shen

Mary Sugden

# Twenty-five Years of Changing Northern Berkshire

In the past 25 years, the Northern Berkshire Community Coalition has affected our community in many positive ways and strives to strengthen and support community grassroots groups, led by caring people of our community.

nbCC has been a catalyst for the development or facilitation of many programs and events in our community that have improved Northern Berkshire for twenty five years. These include:

**BerkshireRides**

**Ecu-Health Care**

**Louison House  
Family Life Support Center**

**Northern Berkshire Interfaith  
Action Initiative**

**Martin Luther King, Jr. Day of Service**

**The Neighborlies: Community  
Recognition Awards**

**Northern Berkshire National Night Out**

**Summer Neighborhood Basketball League**

**The Groove Teen Coffeehouse**

**Teen Writing Workshop**  
**Youth Leadership Program**  
**nb21, Local Substance Abuse  
Prevention Program**  
**Safe Homes**  
**Berkshire Youth Development Project**  
**Northern Berkshire Youth Collaborative**  
**Berkshire County 411  
in the 413 Youth Conference**  
**Berkshire County Youth Workers Summit**  
**Northern Berkshire Community  
Outreach Workers**  
**Mass in Motion in the Communities  
of Adams, North Adams, and Clarksburg**  
**Northern Berkshire Caregiver's Guide**  
**Northern Berkshire Resource Guide**  
**Summer Youth Activities Guide**  
**The Friendship Center Food Pantry**  
**Alcohol Compliance Checks**  
**Alcohol Server Trainings**  
**Berkshire County  
Prescription Drug Roundups**  
**Berkshire County Prevention  
Needs Assessment Surveys**  
**Northern Berkshire Systems  
of Care Committee**



## **The Northern Berkshire Community Coalition**

### **2012 STAFF**

**Al Bashevkin**  
*Executive Director*

**Liz Boland**  
*Business Manager*

**Wendy Krom**  
*Northern Berkshire Neighbors*

**Kate Merrigan**  
*UNITY*

**Lois Daunis**  
*Grants Manager, nb21*

**Annie Rodgers**  
*Coalition Program Associate*

**Amber Besaw**  
*The Family Place*

**Amanda Chilson**  
*Mass In Motion*

**Bert Lamb**  
*Communications  
Coordinator*





## NBCC—25 YEARS OF PARTNERSHIP

*The Coalition has been both a "friend and partner" in its effort to create health and well being in the NB community. I've been a Board member of the Coalition since its inception in 1986, and its focus on the community is what has kept me involved. My work as a therapist has been directed towards the individuals and families who struggle with life and relationship issues and who reach out when powerful challenges affect their quality of life. The Coalition works on the bigger picture.. the community issues that overwhelm my clients. We travel this course hand in hand - and I am grateful.*

—Maggie Bittman  
Community Psychotherapist

## Our Community— Facing Challenges

By all indications, the Northern Berkshire area saw its most difficult economic times during the 1980s. Large retail establishments (Ames, England Brothers Department Store, Heritage Supermarket) had closed their doors to business. Early in 1984, the Adams Print Works announced its permanent closing, and later in the year, Sprague Electric Company, the region's largest employer, announced a major reduction in its workforce, relocating its headquarters to metropolitan Boston. Other factories were to follow and by 1990, fourteen manufacturing plants had closed. All told, some 5,000 Northern Berkshire jobs were lost. According to studies by the local workers' assistance center, more than three quarters of those who lost their jobs were unwilling to relocate. They were either going to find a new job locally or remain unemployed. Driving around Northern Berkshire, we saw empty factories and empty storefronts. The picture was bleak and the future uncertain.

By 1986, the economic downturn was on everyone's mind. Something had to be done. What would happen to the dislocated workers once unemployment benefits ran out? How were the local agencies communicating with one another about how to help?

Enter the Northern Berkshire Health and Human Services Coalition (NBHHSC). Understanding the Northern Berkshire spirit and with a commitment by local agencies to work and meet together, the Coalition saw its beginnings. Among those first involved with the original Coalition steering committee were Dan Allen, Ann Awad, Maggie Bittman, Dan Bosley, Frank Dorsky, Cathy Dudley, Ann Edmunds, Thorman Hulse, Theresa Louison, Fred Nicholaev, Neil Novik, Tony Nuvalle, Warner Smith and Myles Whitney. Monthly gatherings at the North Adams American Legion Hall began with some skepticism, yet everyone continued the process for fear they would be left out. Slowly, the Coalition began to find its way. It was further motivated by the successful advocacy that brought an office of Berkshire Council on Alcohol and Addictions to Northern Berkshire and that continued the local workers' assistance center beyond its end date. The Coalition found funding for Helpline, Inc. and established the Family Life Support Center and Louison House. The need for a local health and human services coalition became clearer to all.



### Setting the Stage for the Coalition

*A year before the start of the Coalition, Neil Novik and I sat outside the chambers of the Massachusetts Senate, waiting for Senator Peter Webber to leave the session to come out and meet with us. The Senator emerged and moved Neil and I into an elegant suite, where we sat and chatted. We started a coalition following a major plant closing in the Atholl/Orange area. Senator Webber wanted to know whether there would be any value in a similar coalition in Northern Berkshire, where some of the same conditions existed.*

*After a brief discussion of the work done in the North Quabbin area, Senator Webber was convinced that the model had some potential. He would write a cover letter to a dozen key folks from North Berkshire, asking them to sit down and have a discussion with us for an assessment. That's how it started. Meetings with the key informants were interesting and often difficult. There was agreement that there could be improvements in coordination and communication among those providing services in trying to improve the quality of life in the Northern Berkshire area. But that's where agreement stopped. About a third of those interviewed believed that this kind of coalition building would never work in their area. Another third thought it had some potential but were not very enthusiastic. And one third thought it was a good idea and worth trying. We, however, were ready to try so we proceeded to write a summary report; got the Senator's additional support; then, went out to find the resources to hire a coordinator and launch the Coalition.*

*It was an hour-plus drive from Amherst to North Adams, a ride that I would take frequently over the next ten years, in all kinds of weather. I was always awe-struck by the drama of the entry into the city. On a clear day, the view from the top was the most stunning in the entire state—gorgeous panorama of the Northern Berkshire area. But at the bottom of that entrance, there was the opposite scenario—closed manufacturing plants and boarded-up stores on Main Street. These were the contrasting images of the situation facing the area and facing the Coalition's start-up efforts . . . magnificent potential and huge problems.*

*Once Neil and I were finally able to sit in a room with the people of the Coalition, we could appreciate their smiles, their energy, their commitment and their deep passion for their hometowns. Their energy made all the work possible—all the work together.*



# Genesis—Vignettes from the Start of nbCC

Organizations such as the Northern Berkshire Health and Human Services Coalition don't just materialize. They need definition. They need a plan and people to carry out the plan. And they have to start somewhere. The community Coalition began thanks to the efforts of many. The following represent stories of the early days and activities of the Northern Berkshire Health and Human Services Coalition (NBHHSC) later to be renamed as the Northern Berkshire Community Coalition.

## Humble Beginnings— Finding a Home for the Coalition

NBHHSC had very humble beginnings. Having hired a person to lead it, there was a need to consider where the Coalition was to be housed. During its early days, Al Bashevkin, Myles Whitney and Steve Green approached the president of North Adams State College (not yet named Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts) to see if the College could be the home for the Coalition.



What does it mean to be a home? In the early years, the College provided office space for the Coalition, first through an academic office in Murdock Hall and later, as the needs grew, to a residential townhouse. Newsletters were copied and mailed by the College. There was a phone, access to a fax machine and eventually an Internet account. The College hosted many of the early annual meetings, celebrations and other gatherings within its facilities.

Eventually, the College needed its space and the Coalition needed more space, so in 1997 the Northern Berkshire Community Coalition (nbCC) moved to its present location at 85 Main Street in North Adams. The Coalition budget now provides for all the services that the College provided in that first decade.

The Northern Berkshire Health and Human Services Coalition has North Adams State College to thank for its early success. The College saw the benefits, in terms of providing an active education for its students and the tremendous service opportunities the Coalition afforded. It also saw its donation to nbCC as a necessary contribution to the greater Northern Berkshire community by its local public liberal-arts institution. Without the generous donations by NASC, nbCC would not have had the start that it did and probably would not be the community leader it is today.

*In 1986, a close relationship began between the Northern Berkshire Health and Human Services Coalition (now the Northern Berkshire Community Coalition) and North Adams State College (now the Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts). Al Bashevkin, Executive Director of the NBCC, was teaching a Social Work class when the Coalition began and the College and Department were happy to have him use his office space to get the Coalition off the ground. The Sociology, Anthropology, Social Work Department and the Coalition share the values of learning about the community and its various parts and looking at ways which can help to alleviate problems and support solutions.*

*What began as a serendipitous relationship has grown into one that is of great meaning and importance to both the Coalition and the College. I believe that both have gained from this relationship and that they will continue to do so in the future.*

### 1986

9/86 First monthly forum of the Northern Berkshire Health and Human Services Coalition

### 1987

1/87 Berkshire Food Project begins as a project of Williams students

2/87 Discussions begin for North Berkshire protocol for homelessness – establishment of Northern Berkshire Crisis Fund

4/23/87 Meet the Donors, a panel of grants-making organizations, sponsored by the Coalition

11/87 Premier of *Northern Berkshire Tonite*

12/4/87 Homecoming Ball for the Homeless to raise money for the Northern Berkshire Crisis Fund

Steve Green  
Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts



## 1988

1/88 First Peer Recognition Awards

8/88 “The Need For Comprehensive Shelter Services In The North Berkshire Area” published by the Coalition and written by Al Bashevkin, along with UMASS Medical Students Andrew Schamess and Kelton Burbank

12/88 Meeting with Department of Public Welfare in Boston – approval for funding for Family Life Support Center

## 1989

1/89 Fund for the Homeless Launched by Al Marden, Anne Gibbons, Mark Gold – with goal of \$60,000

3/89 Through a community process, Northern Berkshire Community Action chosen as lead agency for Family Life Support Center. Federal Funding sought by North Adams Community Development Corporation for shelter support

## Monthly Forums at the Heart of the Coalition

Everything must have a heart—a center for the work. Monthly forums turned out to be the heart of the Northern Berkshire Community Coalition. Since the beginning in 1986, monthly Coalition forums have been held at least nine times during the year. In the past twenty years, forums have averaged more than sixty participants. That adds up to at least 180 forums and more than 10,000 attendees participating in the rich community discussions.

Coalition forums offer a place for the diverse Northern Berkshire community to come together, talk about what is happening in the community and spend more time discussing a specific local issue. Elected officials, including State Representative Dan Bosley and Congressman John Olver, attend the forums as a means of speaking and listening to the collective health and human services community in one gathering. Some of the forums have focused on the local Honduran community, local neighborhood leaders, heads of state agencies and those involved with Coalition collaboration.

Topics for the monthly forums have always reflected current concerns in the Northern Berkshire region. They have included poverty, workforce development, youth, elders, volunteerism and transportation, and are often offshoots of the annual September Needs Assessment meeting.

*I remember sitting around in a circle at the American Legion at that first meeting in 1986. You could see people looking around thinking “What are we doing here?” From those first meetings getting to know one another to the organization today, the coalition has evolved and grown as our population, communities and needs have changed. The one thing that has never changed is the mission of improving the quality of life for all of our citizens. The Coalition has been an essential part of every change and improvement in the North Berkshire Community in the past twenty years and is a model of what can happen when we all work together.*

State Representative  
Daniel E. Bosley

## COALITION AS A GATHERING POINT FOR PUBLIC OFFICIALS

From the beginnings as a small health and human services collaboration, the Coalition has been a place for state and federal officials to speak to the Northern Berkshire community. In turn, it has also been a place for the Northern Berkshire region to speak as one voice to address local issues.

Shortly after its formation, Commissioner of Public Health Bailus Walker came to North Adams to speak to the Coalition about the public health concerns for a failing economy. In 1991, David Forsberg, Secretary of Health and Human Services, came to a monthly Coalition meeting to speak about their new vision for services, engaging citizens in making the right decisions. He saw that process unfold firsthand at our Coalition meeting and then visited with our Family Life Support Center to support its unique approach to solving homelessness through prevention, shelter and education.

As welfare reform was unfolding, Commissioner of Public Welfare Joseph Gallant came to a Coalition meeting to spell out what welfare reform would mean in Massachusetts. It was a brave act by Commissioner Gallant, as there was much angst about upcoming welfare reform, but it proved to be a necessary and productive conversation.

*The Northern Berkshire Community Coalition has played an integral role in the rebirth of North Adams. Their unwavering commitment to improve the quality of life for the people of Northern Berkshire has set a standard for which similar organizations should strive to achieve.*

North Adams Mayor  
John Barrett III

The Coalition developed partnerships with schools and began the school-linked services project. Piedad Robertson, Commissioner for the Department of Education, came to talk with the Coalition and local schools about her vision of linking schools and communities. Interestingly, at our meeting at Conte Middle School, Commissioner Robertson expressed a hope that all schools would be wired and equipped with computers. About ten years later, Conte Middle School was able to provide a laptop computer for each and every student. In 2003, Harry Spence, the visionary leader of the Department of Social Services (DSS), attended a Coalition meeting to discuss with community leaders ways for DSS to enhance the delivery of its services as they prepared for sweeping changes within their system.

Representative Dan Bosley is a frequent visitor to the monthly meetings of nbCC. He sees the meetings as an opportunity to inform the community of activities in the legislature as well as what he calls “getting his batteries recharged.” Congressman John Olver is an annual guest at the Coalition forums and has used these meetings to learn about local issues (such as transportation) and to inform the health and human services community about federal issues.

Mayor John Barrett III of North Adams is a regular participant in our community celebrations. As the mayor of the largest city of Northern Berkshire, Mayor Barrett welcomes out-of-town guests to the region, has the frequent role of presenting awards and certificates at Coalition recognition events and participates in our larger functions.



9/89 Family Life Support Center hires Bob Ronnow as its first Director. Coalition investigates if it should become an independent not-for-profit organization

10/89 GE Elfun's renovate Louison House

## 1990

2/90 Coalition Meetings move from NW Regional Education Center to First Baptist Church in North Adams

3/90 Parenting Issues Task Force convenes

Northern Berkshire Parenting Resources list published

Commonwealth Corps, a program that provided jobs for Seniors, eliminated

Northern Berkshire Habitat for Humanity led by Dick Dassatti and Bob Buckwalter begins to recruit and fundraise

4/90 Coalition Steering: Maggie Bittman, Fred Nicholaev, Terry Louison, Neil Novik, Al Bashevkin, Meg LeRay, George Mercer, Peg Oullette, Al Nelson, Theresa Louison, Thorman Hulse

Ray Burke appointed new director of Massachusetts Department of Social Services Pittsfield Area Office

5/90 Coalition operating principles adopted by its Steering Committee

9/90 Berkshire County Commissioners stop funding health and human services

Fifty-five organizations/individual's contributing to the NBHHSC

Publication of "Alcohol And Other Drugs In The Northern Berkshire Area"

## Getting the Word Out to the Community

Realizing there needed to be better ways to get information about community services out to the public, a group of creative thinkers gathered in 1987 to test new communication mechanisms.

### LOCAL TV BROADCAST

Two community members came up with the idea of a television show to be aired on local cable access television. Dave Fabiano, at the local television studio, helped Coalition volunteers move the idea of a television show to a monthly production. Dubbed *Northern Berkshire Tonite*, and modeled in simplicity on *The Tonight Show Starring Johnny Carson*, *Northern Berkshire Tonite* started with Ken Swiatek and Thorman Hulse playing the roles of Johnny Carson and Ed McMahon, while Al Bashevkin served as the Coalition orchestra with his recorder. The show's premiere in November 1987 was an instant success, and since then, many other individuals and organizations have created their own local television shows that help get information out to the community.



The *Northern Berkshire Tonite* format has always been simple. Guests talk about the topic of the upcoming monthly forum. Interested people shoot "commercials" that are shown after the opening monologues by the show's host. Following the commercials is a taped half-hour conversation among the hosts and guests. It's all done in one shooting and the only editing is of the occasional commercial.

Since its inception, *Northern Berkshire Tonite* has taped at least eight shows each year; thus, more than 150 have been shown to the wider Northern Berkshire cable-television audience.

### MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

Consistency and predictability are keys to the success of the Northern Berkshire Community Coalition. When the Coalition began the work of gathering information and talking about services needed for the dislocated worker, it became apparent that it needed a vehicle to get this information out to the broader community. The media couldn't cover everything about Coalition activities and discussions. Letters were helpful, but not necessarily broad enough. How about a newsletter?

Since October 1986, guiding this process has been -----*The Coalition News*, published ten times each year. The newsletter has been a wonderful mechanism for informing the broader community of the hopes and events of the Coalition. It has also been an historical resource for those engaged in the Coalition.

Each month, just prior to the monthly meeting, the newsletter is received in offices and homes throughout the region. Each issue contains information about the upcoming Coalition forum (and serves as an invitation to attend), notes from the previous forum, articles about



Issues are archived and available through the Web site, [www.nbcoalition.org](http://www.nbcoalition.org).

Coalition events that the community ought to know about, opinion pieces, a calendar of local events and a bulletin board of activities throughout the local service community. *The Coalition News* also invites the broader community to submit information and articles for publication.

The predictable format and consistent delivery have made *The Coalition News* an important instrument of the Northern Berkshire Community Coalition.

### MONTHLY FORUMS

The nbCC monthly forums are known as a place to address local issues. Equally important, if not more so, is the role of the monthly forums as a place to get the word out to the community. Each forum begins with introductions of those present and is followed by brief announcements of community events and the distribution of flyers or posters to be circulated throughout the community. Monthly forums provide local public space for folks to gather, and the networking that takes place is immeasurable. Getting the community buzz going about local events is important. These Coalition monthly forums, with their opportunities for announcements and networking, are an integral component of the communication infrastructure within the broader community.



*"When I meet new folks in town, I always tell them that the best way to find out what's happening in North Berkshire is to come to one of the Coalition's monthly meetings. The heart and soul of the community sits in the center of the circle formed by the caring and committed citizens who faithfully participate in these meetings, listen to one another, and spread the news. North Berkshire is blessed with so many good people, and for 20 years, the Coalition has created many ways to bring them together and keep them connected."*

- Joe Manning

10/90 Violence Task Force convened by Maggie Bittman

Meeting at Salvation Army in North Adams starts process that created the United Neighborhood Organization (UNO)

Coalition hosts a candidates forum for Berkshire County State Senate Seat

### 1991

1/91 "Social Costs of Economic Decline" written by Al Bashevkin published

2/91 Kickoff of Berkshire County Partnership Against Alcohol/Other Drug Abuse

3/91 Legislative Forum with State Senator Jane Swift

4/91 Coalition sponsors its First Volunteer Fair

6/91 Fifty attend Coalition Annual meeting entitled "Coalition Follies" held at North Adams State College

9/91 Small cities funding from North Adams and Adams supports Coalition

Policy statement that would abolish physical punishment by parents is debated

10/91 Basic needs decided to be most pressing issue '91-'92

12/91 EOHHS Director David Forsberg meets with Coalition, "Safety Sieve" described

## 1992

1/92 \$8,000 grant to Task Force Against Violence for campaign against physical punishment- NVP (Non Violent Parenting)

2/92 Congressman John Olver meets with Coalition

4/92 Coalition and Northern Berkshire Chamber of Commerce co-sponsor forum on education reform (unrolling the MBAE plan)

5/92 Over sixty people attend Coalition "Speak-out" legislative hearing

Coalition awarded grant to produce parenting video series

Forty-nine supporters donate to the nbCC '91-'92

9/92 Coalition gets its first computer from Handsnet with support of Health Care for All and begins to use e-mail

Well Child Program gets grant for Teen Parenting Programs

Coalition learns that Kellogg Foundation Community Based Public Health application successful.

10/92 Candidates forum (Jane Swift, Jay Stokes, Judy Grinnel, Shaun Kelly, and Dan Bosley) hosted by Coalition.

## Building the Consensus for a Homeless Shelter

Programs such as Louison House and the Family Life Support Center took time to build and required the steadfast efforts of a number of people. Yet the Northern Berkshire community was there!

Monthly meetings of the Northern Berkshire Health and Human Services Coalition were doing what was expected. They were offering an opportunity for networking among local human service workers, were

providing the community with information about local services and were showing how to work together in this new collaborative environment. At one meeting in the fall of 1987, Terry Louison, Director of Northern Berkshire Community Action, asked the group whether anyone else had seen an increase in the number of individuals and families who didn't have a place to live. Folks working at the Salvation Army, local faith organizations and the Department of Public Welfare looked at one another and agreed: Homelessness was an emerging issue for the region.

What to do was the challenge. Were agencies seeing the same people? How many unduplicated homeless households were there? Would the local community believe this story?

### COLLECTING DATA AND FUNDING

After that autumn Coalition meeting, members rolled up their sleeves and first determined a means of keeping track of unduplicated numbers of households asking for help. A method for collecting this data was devised with the help of two University of Massachusetts medical students (Andrew Schames and Kelton Burbank), statistics were filed and the Coalition attempted to make the statistics of homelessness human. A report was published in January 1988 depicting the extent of homelessness in the community.

This report helped other community members recognize the need to raise funds for a homeless shelter. A group of volunteers (Anne Gibbons, Mark Gold, Al Marden) formed a fund-raising committee. The Northern Berkshire United Way became involved, as did the Department of Mental Health. This grassroots group made a series of trips to Boston to talk with legislators and public-sector funders about where the ongoing financial support for the prevention services might be. The Department of Public Welfare agreed to fund the prevention services as well as provide consultation on how homeless prevention can work. As the Coalition was not in a position to run these programs, a process was determined for picking the most appropriate lead agency. Northern Berkshire Community Action was chosen from a field of applicants. The fund-raising committee raised more than \$100,000, more than enough to purchase a former rest home in Adams as the site for the homeless shelter.

The final piece of the puzzle was funding for maintaining the physical facility and the shelter programs. With support from North Adams City Councilor Al Marden, a previously unsuccessful application to HUD by the North Adams Community Development Corporation for funding became successful. The package for providing services to the homeless population was put together, with the help of many, but with NBHHSC facilitating the process each step of the way.





## Transitioning Into Our Neighborhoods

The Northern Berkshire Health and Human Services Coalition developed a predictable and effective structure to bring together those necessary for community betterment through the creation of dedicated media: the newsletter, the television show and monthly forums. The Coalition brought together those working in the community and, as the next step, brought the community into local conversations and into the work.

In a similar vein, Northern Berkshire Neighbors came into being. Early in 1990, the North Adams Community Development Corporation asked the Coalition to help with a new housing project. It was planning to purchase and renovate housing on Bracewell Avenue for affordable rentals. Could the Coalition help supply services to residents of these affordable units? Working together, the two organizations went into the neighborhood and talked with residents to determine what their experiences were within the community. After all, it's hard to supply services to a neighborhood if you don't know what the residents need.

These informal gatherings led to a neighborhood meeting at the Salvation Army on October 1, 1990. Nearly seventy residents and community leaders, many more than expected, attended this meeting. The meeting provided a platform for residents of the River Street/Bracewell Avenue/Hall Street neighborhoods (later to be called United Neighborhood Organization, UNO) to speak their minds. And speak they did! There was both celebration of what the neighborhood was and a sense of sadness and anger at the issues neighbors were experiencing. These concerns included a feeling that the neighborhood was being ignored by many local services and that an increase in vandalism and littering showed a sense of disrespect for the neighborhood.

The Coalition provided the initial platform for neighbors of the UNO neighborhood to come together and address issues they were facing. Sixteen years later, UNO is still an active, vibrant neighborhood association and there are others that have followed.



*The Northern Berkshire Community Coalition has been a driving force by reaching out to the community in order to build stronger neighborhoods, and promote positive youth development. The people of NBCC are extraordinary and dedicated. I am honored to have the Northern Berkshire Community Coalition in my district.*

Former State Senator  
Andrea Nuciforo

*"I was a tenant at Mohawk Forest when Kathy Keeser first brought us together for a meeting at the VFW. This opened the door for a tenants' association to interact with management. Over the years, I've seen us become more of a community that has grown together. Families once so separate in their own apartments have blended together and have a better understanding of one another. I remember as a young single mother looking forward to the activities that NBN helped us organize, such as the movie nights and the annual picnic. Now we have a place of our own to meet and, as part of the management staff of Mohawk Forest, I value, appreciate and welcome the presence of NBN in our neighborhood."*

Barbara Breda-Bolte  
Mohawk Forest

## From One to Many and Still Growing— Neighborhood Development

UNO was the seed for grassroots neighborhood development. It led to the birth of Northern Berkshire Neighbors, which became a catalyst for the organizing of more than fifteen local neighborhood groups in North Adams, Clarksburg, Adams, Williamstown and Florida. As residents move on and neighborhoods change, some groups fade and others emerge. Each has its own purpose, time and way of organizing.



Florida and Clarksburg neighbors organize to provide specific events for children and families at the town school. Williamstown and Adams have an annual neighborhood block picnic with games and social interaction. These events also provide the opportunity for residents to connect in a positive social environment with local police departments, fire departments and family support agencies. Some North Adams groups meet, as needed, to plan activities and address concerns that need attention in the neighborhood, through either a phone tree or a special meeting. Residents work together to create change, build playgrounds, beautify their surroundings and make their neighborhoods safer.

A special focus of Northern Berkshire Neighbors is connecting with families who live in the low-income neighborhood complexes of North Adams. Mohawk Forest, Brayton Hill and Greylock housing developments each have a small core of residents who meet regularly to address issues of concern for their neighborhoods. They become conduits for all residents to have their voices heard and to work together with management and the city to meet their needs. Residents work together to plan activities for fun and celebration during the holidays and summers. Summer craft activities, scavenger hunts, outdoor movies and baseball bring children and families together, which creates a feeling of community within each neighborhood.



### Transformation of Lives

*That's how it was for me . . . as I stepped into the role of Neighborhood Development Specialist. This was not the first time I had been in the position of developing something new. It was in my previous work at St. Francis Parish, as I worked with people to connect with their neighbors, that I discovered how*

*the social structures of our times tended to keep us strangers living side by side. Shirley Davis was part of our development team and as a neighborhood organizer, invited us to attend a UNO potluck supper meeting. The courage and spirit of the group were contagious and empowering.*

*Stepping into the neighborhoods and agencies of Northern Berkshire, I discovered the potential for individual, family and neighborhood transformation. We developed a "Learn to Organize Your Neighborhood" course, which attracted interested residents and community police. Though I received training in the Master Teacher in Family Life program, the Right Question Project and Personal Economic Planning, the challenge was to bring the skills and connections to the neighborhoods.*



-Natalie Cain, SSJ



## Building a Neighborhood Organization

*I don't know how many of you remember the condition of the UNO neighborhood way back in 1990, but many of us will never forget it. Since 1953, my husband, Louie, and I have lived at 95 Bracewell Avenue, where we raised our five children, Bob, Barbara, Judy, Jim and Susan, and we remember well what a beautiful neighborhood it was. Beautiful homes, well-kept yards and everyone knowing each other, visiting on each other's porches while all the neighborhood children played together. Of course, there was an occasional squabble, but nothing major. Everything was fine for more than 30 years. Then, in the 1980s, things began to change. It was gradual at first, but soon escalated to vandalism, alcoholism, drugs, littering and children running wild out on the streets. Most of this was caused by absentee landlords. All of us who had lived here for so many years felt helpless.*

*We tried to sell our homes, but by that time, no one wanted to live here. On October 1, 1990, more than 60 neighborhood residents and other concerned citizens met at the Salvation Army to see what we could do about the situation. Al Bashevkin of Northern Berkshire Community Coalition facilitated the meeting. Needless to say, many angry and upset people voiced their concerns. We decided to meet once a month to discuss what we could do to turn things around. At our second meeting, we came up with the name UNO for United Neighborhood Organization. Our first leaders were David Dunn, then Keith Bona and for the past ten years, yours truly. We formed a crime watch, and with the help of Mayor Barrett, our city officials and police department, we got rid of a lot of the drug and alcohol problems.*

*We held all kinds of parties and activities for the children, such as the MacHaydn Theatre trips (thanks, Marie), holiday parties with Santa and Mrs. Claus (the Kings), activities at the Substation and Playground. These things made the children feel better about themselves and in turn got rid of the vandalism. If you've been around our neighborhood lately, you'll see all the visible changes that have taken place. You'll see our new streets and sidewalks, green space where dilapidated houses have been taken down. You'll see houses that have been rehabilitated. You'll also see our playground on Bracewell Avenue and the city playground at the end of our street. People are starting to move back into our neighborhood and have been buying homes here. In our 15 years, we've seen the arrival of The Porches and the sad departure of Neville's Bakery, both in the UNO neighborhood.*

*We realize that there will always be challenges to meet and that nothing is perfect, but we are also grateful for the positive changes we've made and the friends old and new that we have. People all over will know that we've been here and that we made a difference!*

—Shirley A. Davis  
UNO Organizer

11/92 Department of Public Welfare Commissioner Joseph Gallant talks about Welfare Reform at monthly forum

First Coalition Call Guide published

Child Abuse Prevention Task Force begins

12/92 Monthly forum cancelled due to winter storm (second time a meeting was cancelled)

## 1993

2/93 Community Health Network Alliances (CHNA's) created by the Department of Public Health

Neighborhood group called the 4C's in NASC neighborhood created by Lorraine Maloney.

David Dunn hired to lead UNO

5/93 Terry Louison to retire as Director of Northern Berkshire Community Action

Family Bill of Rights published

Ecu-Health Care proposed in newsletter

6/93 Natalie Cain hired as the Neighborhood Development Specialist for Northern Berkshire Neighbors

Parenting video series produced by the Coalition released

Public Health Incentive Grants announced.

9/93 Invitation to "Creating Conditions for Change" a conference for practitioners sponsored by the Coalition

10/93 Fifty-eight contributors to the Coalition

11/93 Coalition meets with Department of Social Services Commissioner Linda Carlisle

# Transforming Into a Community Coalition



After establishing itself as a place to talk with local service providers, the Northern Berkshire Community Coalition began to understand that community growth begins with its residents. Northern Berkshire residents identify with many smaller communities within the region. For some, their community is their neighborhood. For others, it's their language or their culture. For still others, it's their place of work. Community begins with the people we know and trust. The Coalition works to build relationships with the many communities of our region. The challenge is bringing these smaller communities into a larger whole, and as the Coalition matured, it recognized the importance of building a greater whole from the many smaller components.



Once formalized as an organization, it needed a name that reflected the role the organization played with local health and human service agencies, the Northern Berkshire Health and Human Services Coalition. In time, the realization dawned that the work of a community coalition is broader than just helping organizations. Neighborhood leaders, community residents, public officials and others had a mutual interest in the Coalition. The locus of work was with the entire community, including the health and human service organizations. The name, Northern Berkshire Health and Human Services Coalition, didn't fit. In 1994, after a session of soul-searching, our Coalition was renamed Northern Berkshire Community Coalition.



## Having the “Ah-ha” Experience Collectively

Sometimes it's just a matter of bringing people together to have the experience. In January 1993, the Prevention Task Force met to compile a list of our local prevention resources. The Task Force listed programs in schools, in community agencies and within the community itself. The list was long and filled the walls of the Northern Berkshire United Way's office, where the Task Force was meeting. As those in attendance looked over the list, it was easy to see that each program was significant and each program was already making a difference in the lives of the people who participated. As the program lists grew longer, a quiet crept over the room. The Task Force members were all thinking and perhaps thinking the same thing,



How would more programming make a difference in the lives of young people? How would it prevent family violence, youth substance abuse, teen pregnancy, and school dropouts? How would things change through more programming? Seeing the lists of various programs helped everyone in the room to realize there was much already in place regarding programming. This moment was the collective “Ah-ha” experience.



More programming, while easy to consider, was not going to be the answer to preventing the negative outcomes seen so far. The Task Force recognized the need to look at the social conditions that families experience and how the programs could work together to prevent unwanted outcomes. It was important to see what family experiences were like and consider what they needed in order to have healthy outcomes.

Thinking alone or in isolated silos, people look to do more of what has been done to improve an issue. Yet doing more of what has been occurring is not always the best answer. Thinking alone, it's hard to be brave.

## Becoming a Community Member

*About 12 years ago, I moved to North Adams with my family because it made sense for my work. I had lived in Pittsfield for many years but was raised in central Massachusetts. I didn't really know anybody here. Very soon after my husband, our (then) three-year-old son, Ben, and I settled in, I happened upon Northern Berkshire Neighbors. The manager at Brayton Hill Apartments suggested I enroll in a class called "Learn to Organize Your Neighborhood" because I spent so much time complaining about the surroundings there. (There was no place for Ben to play except for a dirty parking lot.) That's where I met Al and Natalie from the Northern Berkshire Community Coalition.*



*That "class" was the beginning of life for me in Northern Berkshire. A new way of thinking was opened up; I began to perceive myself as a citizen of my community. I made friends, I learned so much from some very special people and in a couple of small ways, I participated in changing my surroundings. Over the next ten years, I was in and out of nbCC in many different ways, working on this or that project as time permitted, and a lot of the time I dragged my "little" boy along with me.*

*My little boy has grown into a 6' 2" 15-year-old and here we are again. We're involved in the Williamstown "Communities Mobilizing for Change on Alcohol" group. He is involved in UNITY and the teen writers' workshop at nbCC. It is opening up a life for him that he might not have experienced if nbCC weren't still here. He is making new friends with kids who have goals and care about their community. These kids are working to change their surroundings and make Northern Berkshire a better place for teens to live.*

*Ben is gaining confidence in himself and becoming a creative and thinking human being who knows that he can make a valuable contribution to this world. It is the most wonderful thing that these opportunities have been made available for teens to use their energy for positive pursuits. I am thankful and grateful that the Northern Berkshire Community Coalition has grown, nurtured this community and survived for 20 years.*

*Well done, Al, Kathy, Nat, Mary, Kate, Ed, Carolyn and the rest of the gang! Keep going. Northern Berkshire needs you. Thanks a million.*

— Liz Shiner  
Community Resident



12/93 Talks with youth continue during monthly forums

Martin Luther King Day celebration (Dreamer's Brunch) proposed

### 1994

1/94 North Adams Transcript publishes supplement in conjunction with Martin Luther King Day. "Dreams of Northern Berkshire Youth" written by Coalition staff.

Coalition moves into Townhouse 16 on the campus of North Adams State College

"Blueprint for Prevention of Child Maltreatment" published

4/94 Marie Harpin hired to lead Northern Berkshire Community Action

Strategic Plan for the Coalition unveiled to broader community

5/94 Coalition six-session workshop titled, "Learn how to Organize your Neighborhood" advertised

6/94 Nancy Dunn receives School of Public Health scholarship from the Coalition

Deb Crowley joins Coalition staff

9/94 Ninety supporters of the Coalition, with \$9,000 raised

"Learn to Organize Your Neighborhood" first reunion by participants. Neighborhoods include Washington Street, Amity Square, Renfrew Field in Northern Berkshire and WestSide Neighborhood in Pittsfield

The Teen Billboard Project is sponsored by the CommUNITY Arts Program of the Northern Berkshire Community Coalition and supported by the YouthReach Initiative of the Massachusetts Cultural Council.



10/94 Fifty attend Coalition September Needs Assessment meeting

Four neighborhood groups write articles for the Coalition newsletter

Right Question Project introduced into Northern Berkshire

11/94 Claudia Williamson hired to lead UNITY

Northern Berkshire Health and Human Services Coalition changes name to the Northern Berkshire Community Coalition

12/94 Northern Berkshire Neighbors offers computer classes for neighborhood residents at North Adams State College

## Building the Consensus— a Focus on Youth

The monthly forums of nbCC began in the usual manner in 1993 with a community-needs assessment asking the question, “What’s doing in the community?” Representatives from two school districts in attendance brought up concerns about a growing level of violence and confrontation. Concern over community youth was well articulated by many educators. The discussion evolved into the question of what was different then that might be contributing to the new experiences. While many at the forum shared concerns and problem-solving ideas, the foremost questions became, “Why not ask the young people themselves? Why not offer young people the platform to recruit adults to help make their world a bit safer?”

During 1993–1994, Northern Berkshire youth were invited to most meetings to discuss their experiences. School superintendents, principals, teachers, agency staff and young people met each month. The adults learned a lot about the youth experience, but more important, both the youth and the adults learned how essential it was to meet and talk together. All involved believed that the forum for youth should continue. With support from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, the youth development arm of nbCC, UNITY, was born.

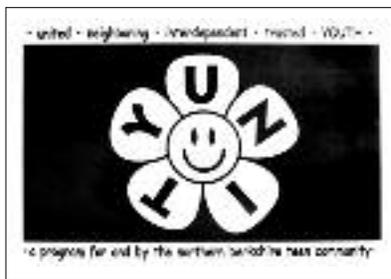


## UNITY

UNITY stands for United Neighboring Interdependent Trusted Youth—coined by founding UNITY teen member Jamie Haddad. With the funds raised and the concept created, the first Program Director, Claudia Williamson, was hired. The defining purpose of the UNITY youth development project was to strengthen the Northern Berkshire voice for youth and to create opportunities for Northern Berkshire youth and adults to work together for a stronger community. Two important facets of UNITY from the beginning were its roots in serving youth in the entire Northern Berkshire region and the focus on positive youth development.

In its beginning, UNITY was a venue for youth to gather locally and build toward a regional entity. Many groups in communities work with youth, but few provide opportunities for them to identify regionally. School and community sports offer competitive venues for youth; faith institutions are generally town-based, and yet issues that Northern Berkshire youth face are not confined by town lines. UNITY, from the beginning, worked to focus on positive change for the youth community. It strived to build upon community strengths and to have youth and adults working as partners. Communities do a lot for youth, but involving and empowering them to be active members of the community offers a refreshing challenge. UNITY has made the adult/youth partnership a key component of its work.

During its infancy, UNITY promoted regional youth forums held in various schools. The agenda for these forums included discussions of the issues that youth face, as well as opportunities for them to get to know students from other schools. A youth-led and driven steering committee set the agendas for the wider regional/North County UNITY meetings. Being a UNITY participant held its own status as a school activity. UNITY allies (faculty or staff from local schools)



*I miss the people. You know who you are! I miss feeling like part of an entire community--not the selective "communities" we tend to choose for ourselves in our everyday lives, but the whole thing. I miss the sense of connection to the big picture, and the sense of personal responsibility for moving that big picture forward. I miss the spirit, the confidence that anything is possible if we just bring people to the table, and the knowledge that the table is there whenever we need it. I miss the celebrations and sharing, and the sense that everyone is invited. I miss the Northern Berkshire Community Coalition!*

Erica Schmitz

UNITY Coordinator & Coordinator  
of Prevention Services, 1998-2004

(continued on page 19)





## 1995

2/95 Shirley Davis joins coalition staff and writes a column, "Shirley's Kitchen Table", for newsletter

Piedad Robertson, Commissioner for the Department of Education, visits North Adams

Coalition discusses needs for an enhanced transportation system.

3/95 Chip Joffe-Halpern hired as Ecu-Care Social Worker at 20 hours per week

Public Health Task Force meets and hears about:

- Northern Berkshire Neighbors
- Student Scholarships
- UNITY
- Public Health Incentive Grants

"Need for Coordinated Transportation" article published in Coalition Newsletter

have supported UNITY members and provided the assistance needed for its participants to attend meetings. A year-end celebration helped UNITY reflect on the work accomplished during the year.

UNITY grew and took on added attributes with new members and coordinators. The UNITY Players were formed. It was a theater troupe that wrote and performed its own plays about growing up in the Northern Berkshire region. Topical matter for these plays came from real experiences, and while compelling, with raw and emotional scripts, the performances helped push others to see and understand the youth experience differently.

UNITY ventured into the arts with assistance from a Massachusetts Cultural Council grant provided to promote arts-based activities to empower youth and encourage positive youth development. UNITY members designed a billboard and a sculpture garden at Natural Bridge State Park, published seven volumes of *Somewhere Between*, journals of teenage writing, and helped with the creation of The Groove, a teen-led coffeehouse. The UNITY program became a mix of youth forums and arts activities.

Most recently, UNITY staff members implemented the Youth Leadership Program, guided by a science-based youth development curriculum with proven outcomes in preventing dropouts and teen pregnancies and reducing school failure. Participants in the UNITY Youth Leadership Program also have a responsibility to perform community service. In its first full year, the young leaders provided more than 150 hours of community service!

*I joined UNITY in 1994, when I was in sixth grade. I was really scared to meet people from other schools. I just imagined them as being really different from the people at Conte. I was happy to discover that we were all much more “alike” than I had anticipated. We all had the same questions and concerns about school, the world and growing up. I think that was what made conversation possible. Well, that and the people who were willing to put themselves out there and start the conversation or ask the questions. I always enjoyed listening to other people’s ideas. In high school I was a member of the steering committee. We had fun there, and then I would be a leader at the full-group meetings.*

*UNITY meetings were always a welcome break from school and they provided an opportunity to be open and honest about important issues that we never discussed in depth during a regular school day. In addition to learning, I was introduced to diversity. Although we were all peers with similar questions and concerns, we were from different towns and schools. We dressed differently and had different friends. We didn’t think the same things were funny or interesting. I met people who weren’t afraid to be openly gay. In fact, my college essay was about UNITY. I wrote about learning to accept and embrace differences and the value of multiple opinions.*

—April May,  
UNITY Member



4/95 Ecu-Care announces grant from UMASS Medical Center to begin its operations

5/95 Congressman Olver and State Senator Swift attend April forum

Brayton residents complete “Learn to Organize Your Neighborhood”

6/95 Fund to assist Oklahoma City begins

9/95 Ecu-Care opens its doors to assist the uninsured.

10/95 Sixty attend September Needs Assessment Meeting

11/95 Berkshire Prevention Alliance funded under the auspices of Berkshire AHEC

Eileen Lincourt is hired as Coordinator of School-Linked Services

First local conference about neighborhoods, “Strength in the Neighborhood”, held

Brayton KIT (Keeping It Together) begins as a youth program for Brayton Hill residents

## 1996

1/96 Father Warren Savage talks with Conte Middle School students about racism during Martin Luther King Day celebration

4/96 Northern Berkshire transportation resource survey to be conducted

First Peacemaker Award given to Ann Cain

Kid Kit, a Brayton Neighborhood group, facilitated by David Landsman

5/96 Series of discussions announced on racism sponsored by Arnold Thomas with Tim Sams of Williams College and Father Savage participating

6/96 Ben Binsswager talks with Northern Berkshire Community Coalition about MASS MoCA

# "the grooove"

*I can remember, as a freshman in high school, my peers frequently complained that there was nothing fun to do on the weekends. A friend of mine, Breanna Robinson, and I decided that we wanted to do something to change that. For the next several months, we discussed our dreams of starting a "teen coffeehouse."*

*Our dream became a reality when we met Kathy Keeser, who had recently begun working for the Northern Berkshire Community Coalition. With Kathy's help, we wrote a proposal for a mini grant (which we received), met up with Audrey Witter (owner of the Appalachian Bean Café) and gained the mayor's approval to start a teen coffeehouse. As Breanna and I talked with our friends/peers about our idea, many offered to help us plan the first event. As a small committee, we found a band that wanted to play. We hung flyers advertising the event and spread the news via word of mouth. We also enlisted several adults to chaperone.*

*On the day of our first event, we didn't know what to expect. We were hoping for a crowd of at least 30. We were extremely surprised that evening, as we ended up turning people away because we had reached the capacity (100) allowed in the café.*

*Our dream of giving teens a safe, drug/tobacco/alcohol-free event to attend on the weekends had become a successful reality and was the talk of the town. Over the next several months, the interest in our project continued to grow. We outgrew the Appalachian Bean Café due to fire capacity restrictions and searched out alternative places.*

*Since the first event held at the Appalachian Bean Café, the teen coffeehouse has morphed into what is now known as "the Grooove" and is part of UNITY. Nothing is more pleasing to me than seeing the Grooove bumper stickers on cars driving through North Adams, seeing the Grooove compilation CDs at local businesses and reading positive articles about the Grooove in the local newspapers.*

—Allison Buck  
UNITY Member

Drury High School students Allison Buck and Breanna Robinson had a vision that became a reality on March 8, 1997. On that night, with funding from the Berkshire Prevention Alliance, a full house of teenagers gathered at the Appalachian Bean Café for a highly successful "open mic" night. Voila— the Grooove was born!



Grooove was an instant success. Teens have met at the Coalition year-round for the past nine years to plan and mount safe, substance-free events for Northern Berkshire young people. At any given time, an average of ten students have participated in the planning of these events. The sustainability of these efforts is credited to the financial support of the Youth Reach Program of the Massachusetts Cultural Council. Besides the high attendance and longevity, another Grooove strength is a history of diverse projects. Beyond the open mic nights, Grooove features "Chick Nite," rock shows at MASS MoCA, a Grooove CD and "GroooveStock" concerts that have featured workshops and speakers on issues such as peace. Now in its tenth year, Grooove continues to grow and explore new ways to meet the need that young people express for safe, fun places to hang out.



# The Guardian Project

## - at Natural Bridge State Park -



*"The young artists who have worked on this project have made a significant contribution of time, talent and energy to the Northern Berkshire community. Their personal commitment to the project's success remained strong through many meetings and several years."*

-Bill Botzow, lead artist

The Guardian Project is a striking permanent installation, made up of nine cast concrete sculptures created by local teen artists. The project is the result of nearly four years of planning, collaboration, and hard work. Developed as part of the UNITY (United, Neighboring, Interdependent, Trusted Youth) program at the Northern Berkshire Community Coalition, the Guardians were designed to honor and protect the natural beauty of our area. Each individual Guardian represents a young artist's vision of guardianship.

The Guardian Project was funded by the National Endowment for the Arts and the Massachusetts Cultural Council. The project owes its completion to the generosity of the Department of Conservation and Recreation (formerly Department of Environmental Management), Delftree Corporation, Grady and Jennings Concrete, Dean Grimes, and H.L. Chesbro Company, the faith and commitment of Deanna Todd at Natural Bridge State Park, and the dedication of professional artists Ron Hyde and Bill Botzow.



### The Artists

Sean Carollo  
 Jeffrey Filiault  
 Jordan Gardner  
 Erin Gerrity  
 Anne Hyers  
 Emily Jaramillo  
 Erica Varieur  
 Chris Winslow

### Adult Artists:

Ronald Hyde  
 Bill Botzow



6/96 Kayte Miller hired to lead Right Question Project in Northern Berkshire

Seventy-five contributors totaling \$5,100.

Over twenty from Northern Berkshire travel to Washington DC for the "Stand For Children Rally"

"Transportation Needs and Resources" Report published in Newsletter

Al Nelson retires from Northern Berkshire United Way

Tenth Annual Meeting attended by 100 plus residents. John Barrett III, Mayor of North Adams, is keynote speaker

9/96 Group from the former Soviet Union meet with Coalitioners to learn about community development

10/96 Gayle O'Brien hired to lead UNITY

MASS MoCA receives grant to open a community computer center called Community Computer and Communication Center

First class for Master Teachers offered by Natalie Cain

11/96 Eileen Lincourt, staff of the nbCC, dies

12/96 "Share the Wealth" meeting facilitated by Maynard Seider discusses the distribution of wealth in America

Sue Beauchamp hired to lead Healthy Schools / Healthy Communities Program

Arts as a Catalyst for Community topic of Coalition discussion

Kathy Keeser hired to lead Northern Berkshire Neighbors. She begins January 5, 1997.

## Ensuring Access to Health Care— Planting the Seed to Build Ecu-Health Care

Early in 1993, David Mangun, Minister of the United Methodist Church in North Adams, returned to North Adams from a trip to Nicaragua. David was inspired by the systems of health care they have in Nicaragua and wondered, "If a country that poor could ensure access to health care for all, why can't we do this in Northern Berkshire?"

David brought his dreams for universal health care access to a monthly forum of the Coalition, and from there, the Coalition used its mechanisms to begin a process that led to the creation of Ecu-Health Care, our own physician volunteer program that provides access to care for the uninsured. Dr Doug Karrel joined the movement early on and with David Mangun, they lobbied for local resources and a committed board of directors to begin what became known as Ecu-Health Care. Initial funding for Ecu-Health Care was found by the Coalition through the Statewide AHEC Program of the University of Massachusetts Medical School, and these resources were used to hire Ecu-Health Care's executive director, Chip Joffe-Halpern.

There are two components to Ecu-Health Care: The first is a voluntary physician program where area physicians provide treatment to area residents, who fall within income guidelines, at a significantly reduced fee. The second component of Ecu-Health Care is helping area residents enroll in all public and private health coverage programs.

Since 1995, Ecu-Health Care has admitted more than 3,200 area residents into their voluntary physician program, and has helped more than 6,000 residents enroll into public health programs. Ecu-Health Care is now seen as a model program for health access.

Massachusetts is now unrolling its most ambitious program to ensure health access for its residents, which will likely change the shape of Ecu-Health Care. Ecu-Health Care staff have been there to help shape those changes. In June 2006 Attorney General Tom Reilly appointed Executive Director Chip Joffe-Halpern to the Board of Directors of the Commonwealth Health Insurance Connector Authority, the state agency that is making key decisions implementing the landmark legislation that expands health coverage to most of its uninsured residents.

*David brought his dreams for universal health care access to a monthly forum of the Coalition, and from there, the Coalition used its mechanisms to begin a process that led to the creation of Ecu-Health Care*



## Eating Beans with Our Nicaraguan Neighbors . . . Reflections

*Did you ever wake up and wonder if the day should really start or if this really were the day that you could stay in bed and just call it a day of "sloth"? That's how Friday, November 14, 1997, the day of the Coalition meeting, began for me. It was snowing and sleeting, and we had a large Coalition meeting with people throughout the state planning on attending. Should we cancel? Or should I just stay in bed and call it a day? After some deliberation, talking with other staff members and waking up the whole world with my dilemma, I decided that we'd do the meeting. Whoever showed up would be the meeting and at the very least, we'd have an interesting discussion, even if only ten people showed. After all, as the Berkshire Prevention Alliance T-shirts say, "The world is run by those who show up."*

*The drive from home was a bit treacherous and at one point I couldn't get out of Bennington. I was dressed, so I figured, might as well go on. I drove a circuitous route to North Adams, did all the preparations for the meeting, talked with all distant travelers and took their regrets for not attending, and walked to the meeting. With a few early birds, we waited for the rest of the flock to show up. After all, it was a snow day for all the schools, and many others were probably taking advantage of the opportunity to call it their own day of sloth. People did trickle in. We did the introductions and more people trickled in. And even more! Before we knew it, all the seats in the smaller circle were occupied. (The measurement of a successful group is how many of those front-row seats get taken.) The meeting stayed on the agenda topic of health care access, as most of the locals who wanted to participate were there. It was a good discussion, with lots of new information for many of us.*

*The day was building. I was thinking we were doing all right with this meeting, probably good that we had held it. Then David Mangun entered with some friends from Nicaragua who were walking throughout the Northeast, raising our awareness of some of the challenges our neighbors were facing. We continued talking about health care and with about ten minutes left, I turned to David to introduce his friends. We heard about life in Nicaragua, listened to some music and were all invited to a meal at the Methodist church, where we could hear some more.*

*I think about moments in life, moments that seem to have extraordinary meaning. I was about to experience another of those moments. Sitting in a crowded kitchen in the Methodist church with more than half of the meeting's participants and others from the church, hearing stories about the Nicaraguan villages and their struggles with what was an extraordinary public health system that was now becoming dismantled, I was profoundly moved. The meal was simple; people's lives in Nicaragua are much simpler than ours. Which brings me to my teachable moment. I often think of poverty as the definition for people lacking material wealth. Yet I think that what's even more important are those who lack spiritual wealth. Our friends from Nicaragua were no millionaires and are probably surprised by the tremendous resources we have in Northern Berkshire. But oh, what a spirit they have. These people are not poor by my measurements. It's that spirit that keeps people alive and helps them thrive.*

*So the second lesson I learned from that day is never count a day out. In fact, often magic happens when we really don't expect it to, or don't want it to. The next day I consider a day of sloth, I'll remember my experience with my Nicaraguan friends.*

—Al Bashevkin  
Coalition News, Dec 1997



## Supporting Community Projects

The Northern Berkshire Community Coalition is well known for its public functions: monthly forums, neighborhood gatherings and youth leadership activities. Its strength is in its capacity to bring people together. Many people are unaware that in addition to the public events, nbCC makes financial contributions channeled through the Coalition by generous supporters to strengthen the local community.

All too often opportunities and good ideas are lost because there have not been enough resources to support them. Recognizing the need for money to support creative ideas, nbCC has, since the early '90s, committed monies from its budget each year to support conference participation and a host of community projects. In 1993, the Coalition began Public Health Incentive grants. Since then, several thousand dollars each year have been allocated to support projects that benefit the local community. Grants have supported landscaping and bathrooms for outdoor athletic venues, art programs for seniors, numerous neighborhood celebrations and a variety of support groups.

During the latter part of the '90s, with the City of North Adams as a partner, nbCC provided resources to help build four neighborhood playgrounds. Additionally, it has given annual neighborhood grants to fund activities to bring neighbors closer together. These activities include holiday celebrations, back-to-school gatherings and neighborhood block parties.

The Coalition provides opportunities for neighborhood residents and community leaders to attend national conferences on neighborhoods and prevention. Recently, it allocated two full scholarships for committed Northern Berkshire residents to attend the University of Massachusetts Graduate School of Public Health. Since 2004, Coalition staff members have taken local police to a national conference on the enforcement of underage drinking laws. Since 2005, nbCC has provided nine scholarships to send local residents to the annual New England Prevention Institute. Since its inception, the Coalition has spent well over \$100,000 in projects and scholarships that have made a difference in the local community.

*Since its inception, the Coalition has spent well over \$100,000 in projects and scholarships that have made a difference in the local community.*

*We live in a world of interdependence where we thrive on a sense of Community. The Coalition has been a framework to facilitate our access to a variety of connections, reaching out to all of us in a heartfelt and personal manner. We not only receive help, but also gain the wonderful feeling that comes from working together.*

Patrice Bolgen  
Community Resident



## Coalition Works to Build a More Peaceful Community

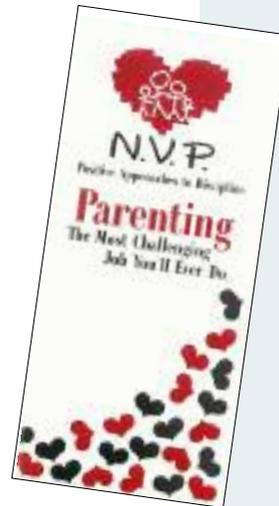
The Coalition, beginning in the early 90's, was involved in a series of community projects that advanced the ideals of peace and tolerance.

### ENDEAVORS FOR FAMILY

Since the earliest discussions of the Northern Berkshire Community Coalition, the topic of family violence has continued to offer a high level of discomfort. Early revelations about the numbers of Northern Berkshire children in Department of Social Services (DSS) custody raised more than a few eyebrows. There were debates about what these numbers mean, but ultimately representatives of nbCC saw the need to address the issue of family violence. One child, one family living in fear of violence is one too many.

In March 1990, with the voice and leadership of Coalition founder Maggie Bittman, a Parenting Issues Task Force was formed. Struggling to find the path to make a difference, Steve Ryan, DSS staff member, offered a suggestion. Why not start a movement to promote nonviolent parenting in Northern Berkshire? Why not offer the community tools for discipline that do not include physical violence? Connecticut Judge David Gil, who was advocating for a constitutional amendment that would offer a Children's Bill of Rights, bolstered Steve's concepts. There was momentum and with an \$8,000 grant from Citizens Against Child Abuse, the group Non-Violent Parenting (NVP) was launched.

Thousands of brochures were distributed that offered information about the need for child discipline and the importance of disciplining without violence. Speakers fanned out throughout the community presenting the argument for nonviolent parenting. A family pledge of nonviolence was signed by hundreds of Northern Berkshire families. Understanding that while advocating for nonviolent parenting, it was also important to advocate and support strong families. A Family Bill of Rights was written to engage the community in discussions about what families needed to be healthy and strong. The elected bodies in Williamstown, North Adams and Adams adopted this bill.



*There was momentum and with an \$8,000 grant from Citizens Against Child Abuse, the group Non-Violent Parenting (NVP) was launched.*

### 1997

2/97 Three Rural Health Outreach Workers, Charlene Hildebrand, Seanna Flagg, and Gayle O'Brien hired by the Coalition to assist Healthy Connections Program

VNA and Comp Care, two homecare organizations to merge

4/97 UNITY players perform for Coalition meeting

6/97 Coalition seeks to determine whether its own incorporation is a good idea

Year of the Neighborhood proposed as a series of neighborhood events



6/97 Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services of the Berkshire forms through merger of Berkshire Center for Alcoholism and Addictions and Mental Health Services of the Berkshires

9/97 Coalition office moves from the campus of MCLA to 85 Main Street, Suite 300

11/97 Gail Bobin chairs Domestic Violence Task Force

Sharon Band joins Healthy Connections as Coalition staff

## 1998

1/98 Elders talk about need for snow shovelers during December monthly forum

UNITY young people participate in Team Harmony at Boston Garden

3/98 Eighty-five attend Coalition monthly forum, speaking with youth. Allison Buck and Breanna Robinson view sites suggested at meeting for teen coffeehouse

Community Recognition Awards first offered

4/98 First EXPO planning begins

6/98 Playground building begins at the Neighborhood Connection neighborhood

Coalition sponsors special meeting about “liveable wages”

Coalition program (Healthy Connections) becomes part of Ecu-Health Care

9/98 Erica Schmitz joins UNITY staff



## ENDEAVORS FOR COMMUNITY

Converging ideas led to the creation of the Martin Luther King Day celebration in Northern Berkshire. After a series of monthly forums about local youth violence during the fall of 1993, the Coalition considered a program for Martin Luther King Day that would promote diversity, tolerance and nonviolence. During the same period, a movement from the Northern Berkshire Neighbors staff considered how to help express the hopes and dreams for Northern Berkshire residents. Why not use the occasion of the birthday of Martin Luther King, Jr. to bring the region together to dream about its future? The first Martin Luther King Day celebration was held in January 1994—during a blizzard! In spite of the weather, the strong participation underscored the theme of dreaming and working for a better future.

Energized volunteers rallied together to have a “dreamer’s brunch.” The organizers of the first Martin Luther King Day celebration collaborated with St. John’s church to share food as well as dreams for the future. Dream catchers, tasty food and newsprint to capture the dreams for the future were in abundance. More than fifty hearty souls participated in the first celebration in the blizzard.

Martin Luther King (MLK) Day celebrations have grown in size and program. Today, activities continue with vibrancy and expanded coordination with the churches and a variety of local organizations. Held at the Baptist Church in North Adams, MLK Day is a celebration of Northern Berkshire diversity with songs, poems, speeches, reflection and a good meal. A highlight of MLK Day is the presentation of the annual Peacemaker Award. Given to a Northern Berkshire resident who best represents the ideals of Martin Luther King, Jr. the award is a great honor that is also given at other times during the year, and one that stirs the emotions of all in attendance.



## Racism Is a Tough Issue: Conversations Must Continue

*These past few months have witnessed many discussions, moments of anxiety, lots of introspection about the issue of racism and power in our community. This is not an easy issue for rural communities or, for that matter, any community. Most of us have participated in different experiences both within the sheltered Berkshires and well beyond. The national media fuel many prejudices and fears. And the world is changing faster seemingly each day.*

*As a Coalition coordinator, I thought I had the answers. In the past, we had some success at finding consensus about some difficult issues. Discussions the Coalition led in 1988 about what we could do to help people who were homeless were not easy. Listening to our young people talk about their lives has been disconcerting. Finding the line between family rights and responsibilities has fostered some heated discussions. We want to find quick answers and create common language and understanding. By listening as well as talking to one another, we can find common ground. The conversations are as important as the answers.*

*As I write this, I see how easy it is to slip into what has worked and how difficult an issue racism can be, because we don't know the answers. Solutions come, but they take work. I thought that just bringing all the parties together to discuss the issues was all we needed. After all, if there is good faith, then we can move forward. I believe that there is good faith on all parts, be it the local press, school administrators or staff, members of the clergy association, members of the Coalition or others. We all have the community and its youth as our interest. On that level, I believe we are on the same page. Yet the issue of racism is complex and is affected by our own experiences and viewpoints. Here, we have a bit harder time finding the same page. It will take time. Some discussions uncomfortable for us have taken place in searching for the common ground. In the past months, I have found myself at odds with representatives of the media, clergy, school and others about this issue.*

*Yet, despite their difficulty, these discussions need to continue. We should appreciate all who are working for an understanding of this issue. It is easiest to walk away from it, but everyone has hung in there. And that's what we've got to do. We've got to continue to find safe ways to talk about difficult things. The region is changing. It's becoming more diverse. We've got to come to grips with what that may mean for each of us. And we have to use what works in a small rural community—the relationships we have with one another—to work toward ways to address community racism.*

*I hope that the Coalition newsletter can be a safe forum for us to explore some of our own thoughts about this issue. Write to us, and as long as it is a respectful understanding, we'll print it. It's another way for us to keep talking.*

—Al Bashevkin  
*Coalition News, April 1996*



**M**artin Luther King Day celebrations were created to promote peace and tolerance. During one celebration in 1996, Father Warren Savage asked a small group of Conte Middle School students how school was for them. The conversation that ensued brought out feelings from the students that they were not treated fairly because they were African-American. Father Savage could not let these comments drop and a very public conversation with school administrators, public officials and others ensued about race/tolerance/and a small town in the Berkshires.



9/98 Coalition Office moves to 85 Main Street in North Adams, Suite 332

Mass Cultural Council Youth Reach Grant awarded to Coalition

Linda Carlisle, of DSS, presents eighty thousand dollar check to Coalition for recognition as a Community Connections site

10/98 Coalition announces its intention to become its own not-for-profit organization.

11/98 Coalition sends eight representatives to Healthy Communities Institute

WEIU unveils Self Sufficiency Standards in North Adams

UNITY Teen coffeehouse premier

12/98 Coalition Board elects officers

Hundreds attend Neighborhood Expo with Peter Gorski as keynote speaker

NEAR Honduras writes open letter requesting donations after Hurricane Mitch

## 1999

1/99 "Visions for a Healthy Community" is topic of Coalition meeting

NEAR Honduras opens office in North Adams to coordinate relief efforts of Hurricane Mitch

## Endeavors by and for Ordinary People

*It really is the ordinary people who know how to build community. Ordinary people do their work around the kitchen table; and action in the Northern Berkshire community begins with that time around a table. Sometimes it's Shirley's kitchen table or Linda's in Greylock or Joe Rogge's in Adams or Joe Manning's at the Bean. And in Northern Berkshire, the work gets accomplished around other tables. But it is the act of sitting together around a table or in a circle and talking about the issues that matter that gets stuff done. That's the Coalition way—that is what makes the difference.*

-Coalition News

## THE "NEIGHBORLIES" AWARDS

Seeking a mechanism to say thank you to the many volunteers who work to improve the community, Coalition staff created a special award. Of course, people thank one another all the time for the big things and for the little things that are meaningful. But Kathy Keeser spearheaded a concept that turned the thank-yous into a community celebration. These special award ceremonies came to be known as the "Neighborlies."



Twice each year (three times in the first couple of years), people of the region nominate individuals or groups to be honored for shoveling sidewalks after winter storms, for tending to an ill neighbor, for planting flowers or other acts of beautification, for raising funds for a neighborhood/community need and for hundreds of other acts of kindness that may have gone unnoticed. "Neighborlies" honors have also gone to entire classes of people. Teachers, police, firefighters and public-works employees have been honored. The celebrations, attended by 150–200 persons, are always fun, with the audience in constant applause for the "heroes and heroines" being honored. Few get through an evening without shedding a tear or two in response to an especially moving story. Everyone honored receives a certificate and a handshake from North Adams Mayor John Barrett III, who understands how important it is to thank people for their efforts. The Mayor and the Coalition together make clear through these events that the larger community and region are better places because of the good works of our neighbors. Those good works are worth recognizing and celebrating.

*The Coalition is, in some sense, the moral compass of the Berkshires. I don't know of any other organization that devotes so much effort to defining—and fulfilling—the needs of the community, while making the community itself as broad, inclusive, and nurturing as possible.*

Paul W. Marino, *community resident*



## **MCLA and Williams Students' Work Supports the Coalition and the Community**

Through the years, nbCC has been fortunate to have a good working relationship with both MCLA (Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts) and Williams College. Students have served and learned at a wide variety of levels. Various student organizations, as well as individuals, have assisted in service programs—putting together gifts for new foster-care children, providing a baseball clinic for neighborhood teams, helping with tasks to support the Neighborhood EXPO, joining in a neighborhood beautification project and more.

Sociology/Anthropology/Social Work students of MCLA have provided service learning through their classes—interviewing and preparing people for Neighborhood EXPO sessions, helping with neighborhood after-school programs, examining poverty at the local level and other needed projects.

Interns from Williams and MCLA have also worked on semester-long projects. Since the summer of 2001, nbCC has been lucky to have Kraft Scholar summer interns from Williams College who work full-time, usually for eight weeks. These interns have created and supported many neighborhood summer projects. The close partnership with MCLA has also afforded an upper-division service-learning course that helps support foster homes in the surrounding communities.

Both the students and the colleges benefit from their relationship with nbCC. Students learn about the Northern Berkshire community and the basics of community organizing and social-work principles. Students learn how community agencies function, how to broaden participation to garner investment in problem-solving and students gain experience in working as a team to foster change. The colleges benefit from the experiences the community offers their students. Theory and practice can be taught together, and the staff of nbCC has been successful in providing local college instructors with active case examples to complement their classroom instruction.



1/99 Virgil Stucker joins Northern Berkshire Health System staff to begin REACH, a program of Northern Berkshire Health Systems

5/99 Ninety-nine attend April meeting (largest ever for a monthly meeting) about youth

UNITY Groove Teen coffeehouse gets National *Points of Light* Award

Neighborhood playground building at Freeman Park and Kemp Park neighborhoods

7/99 Coalition operates independently as the Northern Berkshire Community Coalition, Inc.

Maggie Bittman elected as first President of the Coalition Board of Directors

9/99 Northern Berkshire Community Coalition becomes member agency of Northern Berkshire United Way

nbCC launches Fundraising Campaign entitled "Campaign to Strengthen Community Assets"

11/99 Northern Berkshire Community Coalition awarded Mass Call Grant for substance abuse prevention from the Department of Public Health

Big Brothers Big Sisters comes to North County through Mass Call Grant. They share office space with nbCC.

Freeman Park and Kemp Neighborhood playgrounds dedicated

## NEIGHBORHOOD EXPO—GATHERING TO CELEBRATE

In addition to connecting residents within neighborhoods, Northern Berkshire Neighbors sees itself in relationship to the entire community of Northern Berkshire. This includes all neighborhoods and groups. In 1998, the Coalition planned the first Neighborhood EXPO as a way of highlighting and celebrating people. The theme was weaving the fabric of community through story. Sometimes likened to a community family reunion, the annual EXPO calls the community together for interactive storytelling, music, displays of community projects and the ever-popular lunch, “A Taste of Northern Berkshire.” Hosting facilities in North Adams for EXPO include Notre Dame School, the Masonic Temple and St. Anthony’s Parish Center.

In the early years, keynote speakers Peter Gorski, MD, and folklorist Millie Rahn reflected on the healthful effects this kind of community engagement has on people— together honoring the past and shaping the future. Residents of all ages from every town have shared their stories. Business owners, musicians, artists, politicians and farmers meet, some for the first time, and share their stories. Since 2000, the Peace Maker Award has been presented at EXPO to residents engaged in the peacemaking work of community life. In 2003, planners decided to highlight specific cultural groups from the perspectives of history and the newcomers to the community of today. In 2005, four people from Colombia who have lived in the community met one another for the first time at the Neighborhood EXPO.

Newspaper articles, stories, editorials and letters have reflected upon the significance this event has in the community. Northern Berkshire Community Television videotapes storytelling sessions, which, in addition to documenting community stories, provide the broader community access to an evolving heritage.

More than 1,200 people have come to a Neighborhood EXPO. Each person experiences the heartbeat of the community. Newcomers get to meet longtime residents. Understanding of cultures and history unfolds. All leave with some new appreciation of their neighbors on the next street or in the next town. The success of EXPO is the result of many planners, facilitators and volunteers. Joe Manning has been a key planner and story facilitator. Coalition staff, board members, neighborhood residents and community members generously contribute their time and talent to make this annual event so special.



# Standing on Our Own Two Feet

Staying the same isn't an option for the Northern Berkshire Community Coalition. As the community changes, so must the Coalition. Having the Berkshire Area Health Education Center to mentor its growth, nbCC has enjoyed strong relationships with many volunteers, workers and certainly the founders. The Coalition began with and is indebted forever to Tom Wolff. As founder and cheerleader, Tom brought the community together in the early days, participated in countless steering-committee and community meetings and supervised the work of Al Bashevkin. The time came for the Coalition to stand alone and in October 1998, the nbCC Steering Committee began the process of electing officers and forming a Board of Directors. Maggie Bittman was elected as the first President of the nbCC Board of Directors. On July 1, 1999, the Northern Berkshire Community Coalition began to operate as a not-for-profit organization. Its Board of Directors became the responsible party for the actions of the Coalition.



## **Strengthening the Transportation Infrastructure**

Bringing new services and programs to the Northern Berkshire region does not come easily. Looking at how the Transportation Association of Northern Berkshire (TANB) came into being helps the community understand the details and patience involved.

By 1995, the Northern Berkshire Community Coalition was nearly ten years old and understood what had to be done next. Once again the community network took action. The leader of the Teen Parent Program, Nurit Berman, declared, "If there is one thing that my kids need, it's a means to get around." Public transportation works only so far. If young families were to be employed, the transportation network had to be adjusted. As it currently stood, it served as a barrier to employment. The buzz about transportation began. It was talked about during monthly meetings; it was discussed during steering-committee meetings; a preliminary study of transportation was conducted and published in *The Coalition News* in June 1996.

The monthly meetings provided opportunities for residents and providers to talk about what an enhanced transportation system might do. Such a system could help with employment, it could help families socialize. Youth-serving programs and youth themselves needed more options than what public transportation provided. A decision was made to invite Congressman Olver to a monthly meeting to discuss both the transportation network he had helped form in the Athol/Orange area and what could be done in Northern Berkshire County. An impressive, prepared Coalition audience met with the Congressman in April 2000 to talk transportation. Congressman Olver encouraged the Coalition to work with the Berkshire Regional Planning Commission to formally study the local transportation needs, and he also encouraged a meeting with the staff of the Community Transportation Association of America (CTAA) to help understand what a rural transportation network might look like.

### 2000

1/00 Neighborhoods topic of December meeting

4/00 Seventy-five attend monthly meeting where youth is topic

5/00 Congressman Olver talks at Coalition meeting about transportation – connection for planning grant made

Northern Berkshire Volunteer Fair held May 10.

Coalition becomes member agency of Williamstown Community Chest

6/00 Community Wellness Advisory Board forms

Joe Thompson of Mass MoCA keynote speaker at annual meeting: 125 in attendance

REACH (a program of Northern Berkshire Health Systems) releases first Community Health Report Card with much support from the Coalition

9/00 Tyler Norris comes to MCLA to speak about Healthy Communities

9/00 Access Project studies health access with support from Coalition

Groove concert held at MASS MoCA

10/00 Two hundred twenty contribute to "Campaign to Strengthen Community Assets" raising over \$100,000

Welcome to North Adams Mural (a public art project of UNITY) dedicated

11/00 UNO celebrates 10 years as a neighborhood organization

Drury High School selected as a National Service Learning Leader School

Carolyn Leab joins Coalition staff

12/00 Campaign for Community Participation is launched

## 2001

1/01 *Volunteer Guide* published by Coalition

2/01 Two hundred attend MLK day activities

Charlie Kaniecki of the Department of Public Health offers training on hoarding to a massive Northern Berkshire audience

4/01 Data about North Berkshire launched on coalition site

5/01 Youth lead discussion at meeting

Bike to Work week promoted by Coalition

STOP (Teen Pregnancy Smoking Prevention) Program begins

6/01 North Adams Public Schools awarded 21st Century After-School Funding for three years

Bike path sculptures unveiled by UNITY staff

The transportation study and ensuing discussions took the better part of a year, and by September 2001, a community meeting offered recommendations to work with CTAA to open a transportation center. A year later, with funding and support from Congressman Olver's office and the collaboration of the Berkshire Regional Transportation Authority, the local transportation call center, TANB, opened its doors. TANB has been providing more than 3,000 job-related rides each month to Northern Berkshire residents.

## Strengthening Traditions in Our Neighborhoods

In theory, neighborhood development sounds easy. Just bring neighbors together and ask them to help you understand their experience. In practice, that's a lot harder in today's world. Neighborhoods are different places from what they were 20 years ago and nbCC work in neighborhood development reflects the new world. At

times it's necessary to provide opportunities for neighbors to come together. For many years, Fred Scerbo, a friend of nbCC, offered neighborhood movie nights. Fred would take his projector and a movie to neighborhoods in North Adams and show the movies to kids and adults under the stars. Sadly, Fred died early, but the Coalition has carried on his tradition of Neighborhood Outdoor Movies. Crews from nbCC take the movie projector, screen and DVD player to local neighborhoods for their annual movies under the stars. Since its inception in 2002, this activity has been enjoyed by more than 1,400 residents.

The Northern Berkshire Neighbors Baseball League began with a conversation among neighborhood residents. For many reasons, there are many of the young people living in the neighborhood who don't have the opportunities to play Organizational Baseball. Baseball pickup games are rare. Residents who wanted to play baseball talked to Northern Berkshire Neighbor staff about the possibility of forming neighborhood teams and playing one another. With the cooperation of Mayor Barrett and the City of North Adams, the North Adams organized baseball leagues and countless volunteers, neighborhood youth in the Brayton, Greylock, UNO, Mohawk Forest and Florida communities now play one another. They learn skills of playing a team sport while providing an opportunity for neighbors to get together.



**H**ow we act as a community becomes our tradition. Holidays bring out many local and family traditions, yet we can always add more to our repertoire. Northern Berkshire Community Coalition has fostered many of its own traditions as well. Our manner of speaking in a group, our custom of sitting in a circle, our lack of a head table at annual meetings all speak of traditions that nbCC has fostered.

In a similar fashion, when we need comfort, we seek comfortable foods and places. The monthly meetings of nbCC have been comfort zones for many during some difficult community times. The meeting following September 11, 2001, perhaps best represents our use of the Coalition Comfort Zone.

### Facing Community in Times of National Crisis

*September 11, 2001—we all remember where we were at the time we found out about the attacks on America. The feelings surrounding those days are unforgettable and even poignant. Each community held very respectful services responding to the need to gather as a community and be calmed. Community members talked with their neighbors and families. Many of us were in a fog—shocked, scared and not knowing what was going to happen next.*

*Understanding that community conversations are critical, the nbCC put off its annual needs assessment meeting the following Friday (September 14) and, instead, held a forum on the meaning of September 11. I didn't know if people would show up, or if they did, what they were expecting. I didn't know how this conversation was going to flow. I was stepping into the void. We all were.*

*In times of illness, we go for comfort food. I should have known that in times of crisis, we go for the comfortable places to be. With little notice, more than 80 people showed up at our September Coalition meeting. We sat in our circle, made our announcements and proceeded as we always do at monthly Coalition forums. The audience was as diverse as the community. Dan Bosley, our State Representative, and Joe Manning were there. Coalition staff were all there, as were many whose names I did not know.*

*We talked about our fears of the future. We talked about our hopes for what could come out of this horrible event. We hugged each other at Marie Harpin's urging. We cried. We laughed. We looked each other in the eye and no matter how different our status in the community, we knew we were in this together.*

*September 14, 2001 offered nbCC an opportunity for a remarkable conversation. While the meeting ended shortly after noon, our conversations continued over lunch, in our offices and for quite a while after the September 14 meeting. It's what we do, and for a brief time, our world looked and felt quite different from the week before.*

Al Bashevkin

9/01 Transportation summit held

Massive Coalition meeting discusses implication of the terrorist activities of September 11th

Coalition accepted as site for MASS 211 (statewide information and referral network)

10/01 Steve Green elected president of Coalition Board of Directors

NA Public Library capital campaign begins

Northern Berkshire Community Coalition receives word of a successful Drug Free Communities Support Program grant application

Neighborhood drug-prevention program implemented with Carolyn Leab and Kathy Keeser

### 2002

2/02 Elena Traister hired as Coalition staff to assist UNITY

3/02 Safe Homes Program introduced to the community

Local census data shows changes in Northern Berkshire culture

4/02 Coalitioners gather to write strategic prevention plan

Groovestock 2002 held

5/02 Monthly meeting discussion with youth about prevention service

Coalition moves upstairs to sixth floor of 85 Main Street, North Adams

Lyme disease spreads into Berkshire County

6/02 Congressman John Olver speaks at Coalition annual meeting

Neighbors attend Neighborhood USA conference in Houston, TX

6/02 Erica Varieur starts her own TV show modeled after *Northern Berkshire Tonite*

Fred Scerbo and David Richter, two who have influenced neighborhoods, pass away

9/02 Cultural Competence Conference, hosted by MCLA, held at Coalition urging

Community Transportation Center opens in North Adams launching Transportation Association of Northern Berkshire. Roger Brechner is first Director

North Adams office of the Department of Transitional Assistance at risk of closing

10/02 DET loses staff and keeps local office

MCLA offers course in Spanish for human service workers

## 2003

1/03 Northern Berkshire Anti-Poverty Network begins

Caroline Scully joins Coalition staff to assist with UNITY

2/03 Anti-Poverty Network sets its mission (educate community and strengthen services)

3/03 Harry Spence, Commissioner of DSS, visits coalition

Bob Dean appointed to head Elder Services

4/03 Congressman Olver visits Coalition meeting a few days before we go to war with Iraq. He speaks passionately about the issues.

Coalition receives Decade of Community Leadership award from the Massachusetts Department of Public Health

## Strengthening the Network

The Northern Berkshire Community Coalition, over time, has built relationships and increased knowledge of how to get things done in the community. The community has benefited from this expertise and experience. Sociologists call what the Coalition has accumulated “social capital.” The Coalition calls it community connections. Connections have made it easy for many programs to come to town. The North Adams Public Schools saw nbCC as a critical link as they unfolded the 21st Century Community Learning Center. When Hurricane Mitch hit the small country of Honduras, many local relatives experienced losses. The Coalition helped local Honduras families build an organization and raise local awareness of the survivors of the hurricane. Big Brothers and Big Sisters of Berkshire County built a North County office, largely because of the local request by the community through nbCC and because of start-up funds nbCC found for the Big Brothers/Big Sisters North County office.



In the early 1990s, when education reform was the buzzword, state business leaders along with the Massachusetts Business Alliance for Education brought information about education reform to the Northern Berkshire region through a monthly meeting of nbCC. Data collected by the nbCC student health assessment fueled the REACH Community Health Report Card and Berkshire Navigation in their quests to use local data in measuring community progress. Target: Hunger, a project of the Food Bank of Western Massachusetts, chose the Northern Berkshire region as a rural community to pilot a program that would have an impact on food security for local residents. The Food Bank of Western Massachusetts sought the Northern Berkshire region in part because of the community connections afforded by nbCC.



## Serving as a Model for Others

The coalition building of the past twenty years has provided good lessons. The benefit is that the learning and the varied lessons can be shared with others. There are some articles written about the art of coalition



building (many written by Tom Wolff), and there have been lots of discussions among Coalition colleagues about building communities. But there is no formula for how to do this work. There are some basic premises of how to begin coalition building, but beyond that it's all about the relationships that serve as the base. The process is different for each community. The best manner of sharing is to show others what has been done and help them interpret the process for themselves.

Fast-forward to 2004, and an opportunity to “mentor” another community through the Drug Free Community Support Program. Lacking a specific substance-abuse prevention coalition, Pittsfield has not been able to apply for state or federal substance-abuse prevention dollars. The Coalition could help. The mentoring project with Pittsfield set up a “visioning” process with Voissoir, Inc. This process helped the Pittsfield Prevention Partnership (its adopted name) build a vision for the group. First Thursday Lunches (and later breakfasts) brought ideas and Coalition theory to the Pittsfield group. And a governance system was developed in which the Partnership made decisions about what it wanted to be. The support of the Brien Center, the mayor's office, Berkshire Health Systems, all Pittsfield youth programs, Pittsfield Public Schools, Berkshire AHEC and Berkshire United Way were all crucial to the success of the endeavor. A volunteer leader stepped forward, and federal and state grants were in process. The nbCC model in the Northern Berkshire region served as a template for how this would work in Pittsfield.

### PITTSFIELD PREVENTION PROJECT

Working with the Northern Berkshire community has provided many lessons about community building. And while nbCC has consistently stayed with the local focus, as time moves on, the realization that sometimes it makes a difference to look beyond the Northern Berkshire community for partners in our work has been reinforced.

The Northern Berkshire community has been fortunate to have a coalition in its midst as a mechanism to apply for state and federal funding for prevention programming. Pittsfield lacked a coalition that could make the community eligible for funds to support staffing and programs. The need was there in Pittsfield but the structure was lacking.

Conversations with Marge Cohan, Director of the Brien Center, and a longtime advocate in Pittsfield, began the process of building a prevention coalition in Pittsfield.

Coalitions don't just happen. There has to be commitment and a willingness to give up some personal goals for the greater common good. And there have to be champions of the cause. We found all those ingredients in Pittsfield and thanks to support from Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, the Coalition was able to become a mentor to a new prevention coalition in Pittsfield, to be called the Pittsfield Prevention Partnership.

4/03 Tobacco Control Projects close throughout region as funding ceases

5/03 Groove CD released

6/03 Kathy Keeser receives Mason Charitable Citizen of the Year Award

nbCC receives notice that they are one of 700 applicants for the Kellogg Foundation Pathways to Collaboration competition

Steve Green, Maggie Bittman, Deb Coyne honored as Local Heroes by Coalition at its annual meeting

7/03 John Law elected as nbCC Board President

9/03 Shannon Barsotti hired at Coalition office to assist UNITY

Pathways to Collaboration application submitted by Coalition as finalist for Kellogg Foundation Pathways to Collaboration competition



9/03 John Law assumes his role as the new President of the Coalition Board of Directors

Coalition news available over the internet

11/03 Social and economic costs of youth residential placements discussed

UNITY sends Jeff Filiault and Abby Wood to DC for a Leadership Conference

Impact of No Child Left Behind Act discussed at Coalition meeting

## 2004

2/04 Cultural Council START initiative discussed

First issue of *Talk Around Town*, a Neighborhood Newsletter, published

3/04 Margo Van Peterson joins staff of the Coalition to work with Northern Berkshire Neighbors

4/04 Congressman Olver talks about transportation with Dale Marsico, Director of CTAA and others at monthly meeting

5/04 Underage drinking topic of Coalition meeting

Town meetings in Adams and Williamstown to address underage drinking (CMCA)

UNITY Public Art Sculptures at Natural Bridge State Park unveiled

6/04 Neighborhood leaders attend Neighborhoods USA Conference in Florida

Erica Schmitz leaves Coalition staff

9/04 Ed Sedarbaum joins Coalition staff

Jana Brule hired to lead Transportation Association of Northern Berkshire

11/04 Conversations with the Media is topic of Coalition meeting

12/04 Foster care is topic of Coalition meeting

Ed Sedarbaum assumes responsibility for Communities Mobilizing for Change on Alcohol Project

Coalition receives "Bridge Builder" award from Mass Rural Domestic Violence Program

Affordable housing topic of December Coalition meeting

## 2005

1/05 Representative Byron Rushing addresses MLK day

3/05 Congressman Olver speaks to Coalition forum

Monthly meetings of the full Pittsfield Prevention Partnership served as the place to plan for a prevention framework in Pittsfield. The engagement of many youth service providers, the faith community, businesses, social service agencies, government, health systems and the United Way all brought the theme of working for the greater good. Champions of the Pittsfield Prevention Partnership included Ruth Blodgett of Berkshire Health Systems, Dan Dillon and then Jim Cieslar of the Berkshire United Way, Marge Cohan of the Brien Center, Ellen Ruberto of the mayor's office and Phyllis Sandrew, volunteer facilitator of the Partnership. Jeff Harness of the Western Massachusetts Center for Healthy Communities offered information to the Partnership about prevention. Al Bashevkin was the support and resource for information about coalition building.

Two years later the Pittsfield Prevention Partnership has an active governance committee, a paid staff person, a newsletter, and monthly coalition meetings. They have implemented the Prevention Needs Assessment Survey in Pittsfield to serve as the tool to assess how to work best with the Pittsfield community on behalf of youth. And they now have a good chance of receiving state and federal funding to support their work, located within the office of Berkshire United Way.

## THE BERKSHIRE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT PROJECT

The Berkshire Youth Development Project is an example of a project that has grown beyond the borders of Northern Berkshire. The Pittsfield Prevention Partnership; the South Berkshire Youth Coalition and its Railroad Street Youth Project; and the Northern Berkshire Community Coalition and its youth development program, UNITY—all have community prevention in mind as a common theme. These programs span the length of Berkshire County. They have all worked together to create a common youth survey instrument, the Prevention Needs Assessment Survey, that measures risk and protective factors as well as youth risk behaviors. And they have learned lots from one another.

In the fall of 2005, a series of meetings among principals, as well as with local legislators, led to an allocation to support a countywide approach to youth development. The Berkshire Youth Development Project will bring together a common understanding of the challenges Berkshire youth face, will offer a countywide youth conference and will support the ongoing work of prevention that exists in Berkshire County. The Northern Berkshire Community Coalition has been designated as the administrator and fiscal agent for this project.

Since its inception, the BYDP has hosted the 411 in the 413 Youth Development Conference attended by youth from throughout Berkshire County. New efforts to bring together Berkshire County Youth Providers has resulted in the annual Berkshire County Youth Summit, offering youth providers opportunities to share best practices and to better understand the county wide data offered by the Prevention Needs Assessment Survey. The BYDP was instrumental in bringing to Berkshire County a three year federal capacity building grant through the University of Massachusetts and the New England Network. The BYDP was also successful in bringing resources from the State Attorney General's office to support strategies throughout Berkshire County that will curb underage drinking.



## The Changing Face of Our Community

Northern Berkshire, especially North Adams, has experienced an evolving population and changing, more diverse culture. The ethnic flavor that distinguished northern Berkshire neighborhoods has been returning, especially in the past ten years, as people have moved here from other cities and countries. People started moving to the area because of the availability of housing and safer places to raise their families. As this trend was beginning in the late 1990s, the Coalition was key to bringing together representatives from schools, agencies, and other community members to look at the needs and concerns of minorities through a newcomers subcommittee.

Through this group and with the support for the Coalition, the North Adams Public Schools developed and began an English Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) program. Seeing the need for diversity training, especially pertaining to language barriers and cultural differences, the Coalition sponsored many training sessions. It also worked with MCLA to develop a Spanish class geared for human service professionals, which was underwritten by the Coalition and was offered in various forms over the years in its continuing education program. Over time, more translated material and interpreting services have been made available through nbCC's support and the encouragement of local agencies and programs; this list includes a Spanish language translation of the Coalition's Resource Guide. The Coalition has encouraged and facilitated minorities in the development of their cultural heritage through various methods, including the Step Dance program offered through NBN from 2005 to 2011 and Latin American gatherings as part of the Neighborhood EXPO.

In the 2010s, the Coalition continues to work to foster an inclusive community that celebrates the increasingly diverse populations that comprise northern Berkshire County. We have worked closely with Multicultural BRIDGE, a countywide organization whose mission is to address the issues of integrating multicultural communities in our rural area, to develop their work in northern Berkshire. In 2011, we collaborated with BRIDGE on a powerful monthly forum that addressed issues of race in northern Berkshire. We have also been attentive to another important aspect of diversity that has emerged—supporting and connecting our GLBTQ population. In particular, UNITY has worked with the Live Out Loud Youth Project to reduce isolation amongst GLBTQ youth in the region.



*"Throughout the past twenty years, the Northern Berkshire Community Coalition has evolved as our community has evolved to become a national model of what we can accomplish when we come together to support our neighbors. nbCC is an invaluable resource for our community and I look forward to continuing our years of productive work together for many more years into the future."*

US Congressman  
John M. Olver, 2006

4/05 Pathways from Poverty is topic of Coalition meeting

5/05 Teen Forum topic of monthly meeting

North Adams police chief talks with neighborhood summit

Brayton Hill step dancing team, a project facilitated by nbCC, unveiled

Neighborhood baseball league is great success during summer

7/05 Mary Parkman (UNITY) and Liz Boland (business) introduced as new staff to nbCC

Scott Nichols elected as new Coalition Board President

10/05 Hurricane Katrina prompts special Coalition meeting

Kate Merrigan (UNITY) and Wendy Dickinson (Northern Berkshire Neighbors) join Coalition staff

10/05 UNO celebrates 15 years

11/05 UNITY youth leadership program commences

12/05 Food security discussed as issue for Coalition meeting

### 2006

1/06 Dawud Abdal Salaam keynotes Martin Luther King Day celebration

Helping Hands grants unveiled to support training for human services staff

2/06 MCLA students link with area foster and adoptive families in a unique example of college / community collaboration

Ninety-one attend Coalition forum about bullying

Safe Homes Movie Night examines our culture that promotes drinking through a short film entitled, "This Place"

4/06 Berkshire Idol competition raises funds for Louison House

5/06 Jen Kodela joins Coalition staff as student intern

UNITY Teen Leaders celebrate the graduation of thirteen Teen Leaders

6/06 197 attend Coalition's 20<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting.

Sue and Alex Daugherty receive Northern Berkshire Heroes Award

7/06 Coalition participates in National Night Out

9/06 CMCA project coordinator attends the National Leadership Conference on Underage Drinking

Teen Writing Workshop expands to middle school students after receiving increased funding from the Youth Reach Program of the Mass. Cultural Council

10/06 Michael Amaral presented Peacemaker Award at Neighborhood Expo

186 recognized at Community Recognition Night

11/06 Governor's 9C budget cuts affect Coalition and others

12/06 Newly elected State Senator Benjamin Downing attends monthly forum

## 2007

1/07 Sally and Don Goodrich presented with Peacemaker Award at MLK Day

Youth Collaborative begins "Say it Proud" campaign to recognize youth

Brayton Hill meeting invites police and Northern Berkshire Juvenile Court to give tips for dealing with youth and problem behaviors

03/07 \$5,000 grant offered to teens to "Spice up your County"

4/07 Forum focuses on Campus-Community Collaborations

Community Resource Guide becomes available in Spanish

nbCC and CMCA sponsors billboard to address underage drinking

5/07 nBn leaders attend National Neighborhoods USA Conference in Louisiana

Coalition debuts 20th year anniversary book

Youth Leaders facilitate nbCC forum "Diversity and Discrimination"

06/07 Annual meeting features Lt. Governor Tim Murray as speaker

Lois Daunis hired as grants manager

09/07 Kate Merrigan becomes UNITY coordinator

CMCA TV campaign against underage drinking goes countywide

Alison Basdekis joins Coalition staff as UNITY Associate

10/07 October forum addresses pandemic planning

Neighborlies awards 188 people for doing good work in the community

Coalition board and staff meet with Commissioner of Public Health John Auerbach

## Using Community Organizing as a Technique to Curb Underage Drinking

For years, the Northern Berkshire community has talked about the harmful effects of alcohol on everyday life. Police, educators, social workers and others have linked cases of domestic violence, disorderly conduct, failures to achieve in school, and other undesirable outcomes to alcohol. So when an opportunity came to help the community address underage drinking, the Coalition responded. Science says that if you can delay the age that young people first drink, it's more likely they will have less trouble with alcohol in their lives.

There are many different approaches to curb underage drinking, and at first the Coalition looked to see which approach was the best fit for its way of working. With support and encouragement from the Massachusetts Department of Public Health, Coalition staffers chose the communities of Adams and Williamstown to implement the Communities Mobilizing for Change on Alcohol (CMCA) curriculum. CMCA is a proven technique for changing community opinions about underage drinking.

To change community opinions requires a lot of talking. The outside media can influence community opinions, but common sense says that the ideas of how to change local attitudes have to come from within the community. Early in the project, some time was spent talking with residents and community leaders in Adams and Williamstown to get an understanding of their feelings about underage drinking. Most do not believe underage drinking is healthy, but many see an implicit wink to let it continue.

Local strategy teams were formed in Williamstown and North Adams to change community perceptions about underage drinking. These strategy teams devised educational and marketing campaigns tailored to their communities. Since 2004, Williamstown and Adams residents have participated in many community activities that aim to market the message that underage drinking is harmful. The strategy teams have implemented marketing campaigns using local media, trained community members in the areas of substance abuse prevention, have talked with community leaders on all levels about the institutional responses to underage drinking, and have been the muscle behind local efforts to change community attitudes about underage drinking. Changing local attitudes will take time, but successes in the seat belt and public smoking campaigns have bolstered the hope that the efforts in Williamstown and Adams will be successful.



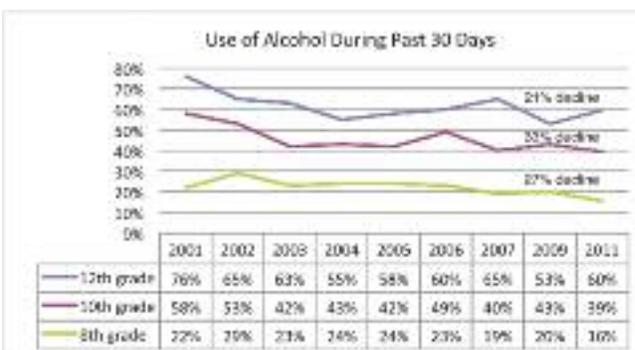
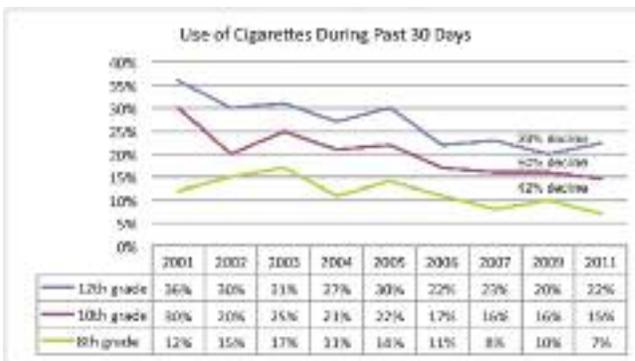
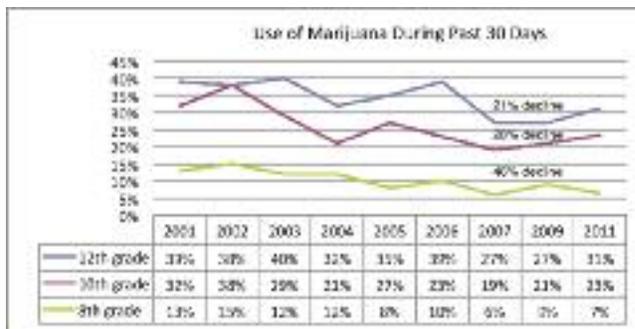
CMCA has recently rebranded the strategy teams to have common identity and name, a simpler and more recognizable name. It is now known as nb21, "not before 21, not in Northern Berkshire." Nb21 is working with the City of North Adams to create a third strategy team to supplement the work they already accomplish in our community: Sticker Shock, alcohol server training, compliance checks, Safe Homes pledges, billboard messages, Rx Roundups, and a presence at community events.



## Positive Results Seen in Underage Drinking and Smoking

The Northern Berkshire Community Coalition began gathering data about youth substance use in 2001 as a requirement for our engagement with the Drug Free Communities Support Program. The purpose of our engagement with the Drug Free Communities Support Program was to build a coalition and promote environmental strategies to prevent youth substance abuse.

Environmental strategies that we used include the creation of nb21 (not before 21, not in Northern Berkshire) to help parents consider ways to change the culture that promotes underage substance use. We implemented the Safe Homes of North Berkshire program to include parents in a network of others who pledge to supervise parties in their home and to ensure a substance-free environment. We educated school officials, parents and youth about the harmful affects of underage drinking. We helped to conduct compliance checks, to ensure that alcohol servers were not serving an underage population. We brought TIPS trainings to the region to ensure that alcohol servers know how to responsibly do their jobs. Finally, we promoted and provided youth development through our UNITY program to ensure that young people were involved in choosing healthy activities. We are proud that our work in preventing underage drinking and smoking has seen positive results. See the charts below:



Berkshire Food Project opens five days a week

11/07 Kathy Keeser honored at 10th Annual Neighborhood EXPO

12/07 Ed Sedarbaum retires

### 2008

01/08 BYDP awarded grant for substance abuse prevention program by the Attorney General

Jenna Cece joins Coalition staff

02/08 Coalition staffers attend CADCA annual leader conference in Washington DC

Coalition unveils new logo designed by Liz Kodela

03/08 Dr. Alex Sabo, MD, speaks to 60 youth advocates about the neuroscience of addiction

Poetry slam led by Teen Writing Workshop participants held at North Adams Public Library

Morgan Goodwin and others lead conversation about green energy alternatives

05/08 Natalie Cain and Marcia Hickson facilitate parenting workshop entitled "Being the Best Parents We Can Be"

UNO Spring Fling has over 750 people in attendance for its May event

06/08 Coalition moves into larger space at 61 Main Street

Take Charge, a campaign to save energy, is launched in North Adams

John Auerbach is keynote speaker at Coalition Annual Meeting

Matt Rodriguez, Kelsey Ryan, Emily Rosse, and Haley Smith win Say it Proud Awards

Coalition sponsors a symposium about health disparities with MA Department of Public Health

09/08 Adult psychiatrists lacking in North Adams is highlighted as a community crisis

Neighborhood picnics held at Mohawk Forest, Greylock Valley and Brayton Hill

10/08 October forum discusses issues of food and fuel and hosts 98 members

11/08 November forum asks, "How do we make better use of community outreach?"

Coalition News features Brittney Sheppard blog, the84.org

12/08 December forum discusses the current and future state of our economy right after significant drops in the stock market

### 2009

01/09 BCAC facilitates a discussion among northern Berkshire agencies about OCTOPIA, a database to help the community track casework for people needing services

Tim Briggs joins Coalition staff

02/09 February forum discusses Hoosic River Revival

Coalition advertises for Community Outreach Workers

Odetta Klass becomes new CMCA strategy team leader in Williamstown

Kathy Keeser leaves Coalition staff

03/09 Tapestry Health announces the closing of the North Adams clinic

The Berkshire CHNA receives a DPH grant to build a suicide prevention program

04/09 Coalition assists volunteer recruitment for Downstreet art

06/09 Williams alum Morgan Goodwin speaks at Coalition Annual Meeting

Summer 2009 Carolyn Leab, Alison Basdekis leave Coalition staff

Ashley Benson joins staff as new nBn Coordinator

Jeff Goldwasser elected president of 2009 nbCC Board of Directors, Deb Rosselli elected vice president

Marcia Gross and Marion Grillon are awarded Northern Berkshire Hero Award at Coalition Annual Meeting

ACTIVE! fitness program held in the UNO neighborhood

70 in Berkshire County attend BYDP sponsored Youth Worker Summit

Coalition welcomes Gracie Vincent as senior volunteer

10/09 October forum invites Congressmen Olver to talk about health care reform and draws largest crowd ever, 110 people

Information released showing 130 people in Berkshire County tested positive for HIV, up from numbers in 2006. Half of the positive tests were women.

12th Annual Neighborhood Expo held

11/09 Forum discusses new mental health services for children

CMCA sponsors lecture series at Mt. Greylock Regional High School

During November community recognition, 85 individuals, businesses and groups are recognized

Dick Alcombright elected mayor of North Adams

12/09 Forum topic is "Caring for our Caregivers"

Youth leaders meet with new mayor to discuss a skatepark in North Adams

## NBIAI Friendship Center has Many Friends in Northern Berkshire

Our April 2010 forum, "Intersecting the Faith Community with Social Issues," brought forth an exciting development for the region. The forum had about 50 in attendance, with faith leaders, clergy, lay people and community members all present. The goal was to discover new ways to get involved with the faith community's helping network. Those in attendance participated in a conversation about how to create social action throughout the local faith community.

Several faith leaders, one being Rabbi Jeff Goldwasser of the Congregation Beth Israel, spoke about personal accounts of how faith had helped shape life choices to a path of religious commitment. The personal anecdotes shared during the forum showed that engagement in social action has motivated many to become part of a faith community.



The discussion didn't conclude with the forum. Forum attendees Al Nelson and Mark Rondeau challenged the group to form a lay-led social action committee thus forming the Northern Berkshire Interfaith Action Initiative (NBIAI) in May 2010. The NBIAI is an effort made up of many people of various faiths and denominations working together to find ways to serve the community.

In July, a discussion began of what community needs the initiative could fill without duplicating efforts. Possible services discussed were providing youth mentoring, addressing homelessness and providing emergency transitioning for those who are not eligible for the Louison House transitional shelter. Ultimately, NBIAI saw a need to serve when food pantry capacity in North Adams declined during the most pressing economic time in decades. Berkshire Community Action Council (BCAC) no longer had the space or staff to run the pantry effectively.

The Friendship Center Food Pantry opened at 43 Eagle Street in February 2011. The 800-square-foot space which houses the NBIAI, was donated by Mike and Lois Daunis, with utilities paid for by BCAC. The center is entirely run by volunteers. Currently, it serves well over 700 households in Northern Berkshire that are eligible to receive food every other week. In total, it distributes an average of 1,900 pounds of food every week.



The center has many volunteers from the community of many different faiths and motivations, but says it is united in wishing to serve their guests with respect and affection.



The success of the Friendship Center, the NBIAI and the networking that has taken place is an excellent example of the good that comes out of the nbCC monthly forums.

## Finding New Ways to Reach Out: Community Outreach Workers

Following a November 2008 Coalition forum that looked at better ways of informing the community about available resources, the Coalition began conversations with North Adams Regional Hospital and the MA Department of Public Health to build a Community Outreach Worker program. Funding for the Community Outreach Worker Program came from NARH through their Determination of Need Process which requires funding for projects that have been determined to have community benefit. Our Community Outreach Initiative engages community minded people who want to make positive change in Northern Berkshire. Outreach workers assist residents in finding resources, and can help to organize residents for the benefit of



their community. Training for the initiative consists of a two-hour weekly course that runs for fifteen consecutive weeks that includes site visits to social services agencies. Outreach Workers build key relationships for their work in helping others utilize needed resources. In addition, Outreach Workers also learn important community organizing skills such as leadership styles and how to build strong relationships.



The first group of Community Outreach Workers graduated in the spring of 2010. The nine workers represented a number of different neighborhoods, towns and people in Northern Berkshire. The 2011 graduation saw 11 people complete the training.

nbCC Community Outreach Workers meet monthly with the Northern Berkshire Neighbors Coordinator for guidance on projects and help with developing skills. This work is essential in completing the Coalition's goal of empowering citizens and improving the quality of life in Northern Berkshire. The Community Outreach initiative helps to accomplish the mission of Northern Berkshire Neighbors: to connect and support residents within neighborhoods to build community, create stronger neighborhoods and make connections to groups, institutions and other resources.



### 2010

- 01/10 First MLK Day of Service is held
- 02/10 Caregiver Initiative plans Caregiver Resource Guide
- 03/10 Forum addresses myths about teens: stereotypes from skateboarders to sexuality to school personalities
- Youth Leadership Program meeting with Mayor Alcombright sparks commitment to form a Youth Commission in North Adams
- 04/10 Monthly forum talks about intersecting the faith community with social issues
- nbN receives local Cultural Council Grant to continue nbSTEP program
- nbCC Community Outreach Workers complete initial training
- 05/10 Forum addresses teen pregnancy
- 06/10 Representative Dan Bosley delivers keynote address at annual meeting
- Judy Grinnell honored as Northern Berkshire Hero for her leadership with the Hoosic River Revival Coalition
- Summer 2010 Natalie Cain retires after 17 years at nbCC
- Northern Berkshire Interfaith Action Initiative forms following April forum
- Youth Leadership Program partners with MASS MoCA on Skatepark Campaign joining the Pepsi Refresh contest
- 09/10 Congressman John Olver speaks about National Healthcare Reform at nbCC special forum
- Roberta Lamb and Wendy Krom join Coalition staff
- First Rx Roundup a rousing success
- Family Caregiver Resource Guide is released
- 10/10 nbCC celebrates 20 years of UNO
- EOHHS visits North Berkshire
- Annie Kirkpatrick-Rodgers joins Coalition staff
- Fall Neighborlies held
- 11/10 NARH/NBH reveals strategy to remain viable in Northern Berkshire at Coalition forum
- nbCC kicks off neighborhood action planning program
- CMCA launches Sticker Shock campaign
- 12/10 December forum identifies tears in local safety net

North Adams forms Youth Commission, three UNITY members appointed to commission along with Kate Merrigan, UNITY Coordinator

## 2011

01/11 Ten years of DFC Support Program leads to significant reduction in youth substance use

02/11 February forum discusses homelessness

Northern Berkshire Interfaith Action Initiative's Friendship Center Food Pantry has a successful opening

03/11 March forum addresses racial and ethnic disparities

04/11 Members of UNITY host monthly forum, "How to Talk with Teenagers"

Meeting with Paul Minor, Mass 211 Director, is held addressing how to better utilize Mass 211 in Northern Berkshire County

05/11 May forum features Representative Gail Cariddi, Representative Paul Mark and Senator Benjamin Downing

06/11 nbCC celebrates its 25th Annual Meeting in June

Summer 2011 CMCA rebrands to nb21

nBn and nb21 participate in National Night Out, with four events in North Adams, two in Adams and one in Williamstown

Pope John Paul the Great Charity Center in Adams is honored with the Northern Berkshire Hero Award

Summer Neighborhood Basketball continues

10/11 Amber Besaw joins Coalition staff

Jackie Kelly joins Coalition staff as high school intern

Higher Ground formed to assist Spruces' residents with the aftermath of Tropical Storm Irene

Coalition forum asks "What did we learn from Tropical Storm Irene?"

The Fall Neighborlies thank over 150 people

11/11 November forum addresses the transitions and challenges of 18-24 year olds

nbCC receives grant from MA Department of Public Health to implement Mass In Motion project

12/11 December forum led by YLP members

nBn hosts workshop about meaningful conversations

nbCC new family center is named "The Family Place"

Amanda Chilson joins Coalition staff to lead - Mass in Motion Initiative



## Strengthening Northern Berkshire Families

During 2011, The Department of Children and Families, in conjunction with the Children's Trust Fund of Massachusetts, gave nbCC the opportunity to build a complementary resource center for families in northern Berkshire County. The foundation of this work will be to support and provide preventative services to northern Berkshire families. The framework for programming and services will be the five protective factors for families; parental resilience, social connections, knowledge of parenting and child development, concrete supports in times of need, as well as children's healthy social and emotional development. Our implementation plan has built existing partnerships with Berkshire Children and Families and Child Care of the Berkshires, the development of an advisory/planning committee, facilitating "Community Cafés" where community members had the opportunity to identify and share with the Coalition what families need to be happy, healthy, and successful in northern Berkshire communities.



The work here at nbCC is just beginning. Amber Besaw was hired in October of 2011 to be the Project Coordinator for the resource center. With the help and creativity of community members, the nbCC Board of Directors, the staff of nbCC, and our advisory board we have named the program, "The Family Place." The Family Place will be joining the current Coalition space at 61 Main Street in North Adams, expanding the current Coalition office. This location will grant us the opportunity to use the conference room space, kitchenette space, as well as add on a family friendly gathering place, space accessible to the community, and a playroom for children of all ages. This project has passed through stages of design and construction and is entering the final stages of painting and furnishing.

Our next steps will include ongoing needs assessments in northern Berkshire, program planning, and implementation. To bring clarity to our vision of collaboration with northern Berkshire communities, our goal is to reach out to area providers, services, schools, and organizations to talk about the ongoing needs and how this program can best support families. We are partnering with local agencies to support existing programming, as well as developing ideas and programs that do not currently exist for northern Berkshire families. We look forward to working with the community to create an overall programming structure that fits the needs, strengths, and ideals of northern Berkshire families.

# 1986-2011



[www.nbccoalition.org](http://www.nbccoalition.org)