

P.A.L.S. Leadership Series Graduates Nine Citizens

LACONIA-Nine citizens from Belknap County have successfully completed a five session, interactive training series that has prepared them to become community advocates for children and families.

Called the P.A.L.S. Program (Parents As Leaders in Society) and modeled after Leadership New Hampshire and the New Futures Community Leadership Institute, the training provided graduates with basic leadership skills to address problems and challenges facing children and families. During the first session held last October following UpStream's conference "Strengthening Families and Communities", participants prepared a personal vision statement for what they hoped to accomplish during the series.



Recent graduates of the Parents As Leaders in Society (PALS) are shown sporting their new T-shirts. Each woman was recognized for her commitment to children and families. In the back row are (l-r) Citizens Council Chair Susan Smith, Monica Sawyer, Tammy Roberge, Heidi Lehr, Bernadette Haines, Gretta Olson-Wilder, and UpStream Leadership Team Co-Chair Tammy Emery. Seated were Katherine Brisendine, Kathy Calvin, Jennifer Gagnon and Umija Gusinac. Program facilitator, Alan Robichaud, is seated in the front. (Courtesy photo)

Developed and facilitated by Alan Robichaud, Executive Director of the Belknap County Citizens Council on Children and Families, monthly sessions were led by over a dozen speakers and educators from around the Lakes Region and New Hampshire. Topics addressed child development, social role models, communication, negotiation and mediation skills, the political process, community service agencies and coalitions. Each participant was given reading

materials to review and assignments to complete in their communities.

According to Robichaud, "The enthusiasm and dedication of these parents was exceptional. They were a very cohesive group with diverse life experiences who engaged the presenters at each session. Children and families will reap the benefits of their commitment as P.A.L.S. graduates continue to apply their leadership skills and implement individual community network action plans."

P.A.L.S. graduates were: Gretta Olson-Wilder and Jennifer Gagnon of Belmont; Umija Gusinac, Monica Sawyer and Heidi Lehr of Gilford; Kathy Calvin, Tammy Roberge and Katherine Brisendine of Laconia; and Bernadette Haines of Meredith. The message on tee shirts presented to the 2005 P.A.L.S. graduates summarized their commitment, "We cannot become what we need to be by remaining what we are."

Funded in part by a grant from the NH Children's Trust Fund, the leadership series was sponsored by the Citizens Council, UpStream, Project EXTRA!, Laconia School District, One Mill Plaza, Inc., the Center for Civic Engagement, Reclaiming Futures of NH, and P.A.C.T.

This training series may be offered to a new group of Belknap County citizens in the fall of 2005. For further information, contact Alan Robichaud at the Citizens Council at 528-3185, email ajrobich@bccj.org, or click on website www.bccj.org. Additional information about parenting education programs can be found on UpStream's website www.upstream.org.