

Citizens Council Welcomes Five New Members

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Four of the five new members of the Belknap County Citizens Council on Children and Families shown together following a Council meeting (L-R) are Sandy Webber from Gilford, Rick Keller from Meredith, Emily Clement from Belmont, and Laurie Belanger from Gilford. Missing when the photo was taken is Micheline Roy from Laconia.

LACONIA: Five residents of Belknap County were recently appointed by the County Commissioners as members of the Belknap County Citizens Council on Children and Families. The Citizens Council was created via a Proclamation from the Commissioners in early 2002 to seek innovative solutions for the maze of challenges facing many families in the County. It is the only such County Department in New Hampshire.

According to Council Chair, Susan Smith, these new members bring a “wealth of unique experiences that will help us to promote the well-being of children and families in our area. Our mission of introducing the principles of Community Justice in Belknap County requires the knowledge and commitment of people like these.”

Appointees include Laurie Belanger from Gilford, Emily Clement from Belmont, Rick Keller from Meredith, and Michelle Roy and Sandy Webber, both from Laconia.

Laurie Belanger, a Student Assistance Counselor in the Gilford School District, has been with this school system since 1992. Previous work experiences include the Newfound School District as the Educational Coordinator; the NH Bar Association as a Paralegal; and the Parent Information Center in Concord as an Advocate and Consultant.

She holds undergraduate and graduate degrees from Colby-Sawyer, St. Anselm, and Notre Dame Colleges. Her longtime professional life as a school counselor has enriched her knowledge of the Lakes Region community, including its schools, law enforcement, courts, social services, and civic organizations.

Laurie is interested in improving access to services for teens in crisis so “they can find what they need from the network of very caring and talented mental health professionals we have in the Lakes Region”.

Laurie was honored as the Educator of the Year by the NH National Alliance for the Mentally Ill (NAMI) where she serves as a member of their Youth Suicide Prevention Frameworks committee.

Emily Clement already has a resume exceeding many who are twice her age. In a span of a little more than a decade, Emily earned both undergraduate and graduate college degrees. During this time she also worked with elementary and high school youth in the Lakes Region, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New Mexico, Alaska, Turkey, Czech Republic, Lebanon, and the U.S. Virgin Islands. As the Director of Christian Education at the Congregational Church of Laconia, UCC, Emily is especially interested in helping youth avoid the pitfalls of underage drinking, substance abuse, and other risk behaviors.

“We need more youth and family-friendly activities in this area,” she says. “I would like to help develop a venue in downtown Laconia for outdoor movies that will attract youth and families.” Emily says she is working with several others on this project and hopes to make it happen “at least once” this summer.

Richard Keller, a Loan Officer with GMAC Mortgage Corporation, graduated from UNH and has a background in business administration. He and his wife Kathy owned and operated Kellerhaus in the Weirs for 16 years and Diskhaus Software Production for 13 years. More recently, Rick was Project Manager for a 44-home affordable housing development in Barrington, New Hampshire.

Recently elected Board Chair of the Lakes Region Child Care Services, Rick is most interested in preventing, as well as treating problems that plague families in Belknap County. As a Certified NH Marital Mediator and with extensive training in Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Awareness, Rick would like to focus his time on building “better mentorship” and “an overall model of a healthy community” for families.

Micheline Roy, a Registered Nurse, received her Nursing Diploma from the St Louis Hospital School of Nursing in Berlin, New Hampshire. After recently retiring from a 13-year nursing career as an administrator with the Behavioral Health Unit and as an Occupational Health Nurse with LRGHealthcare, Micheline now works part-time at Lakes Region General Hospital. Prior to LRGHealthcare, Micheline worked as a Registered Nurse in the Detox and Rehab units at Beech Hill Hospital in Dublin, NH; at the Rumford, Maine Nursing Home; and in Pediatric Units at Massachusetts General Hospital and St Louis Hospital in Berlin.

Says Micheline, “My personal experience of raising my own family of four children shows how fortunate I am to have a close knit, extended family,” she says.

Her professional work as a nurse in pediatrics, substance abuse prevention, and behavioral health supports her belief that “the well being of children is so dependent on responsible adults. In the scope of my practice, it has always been my endeavor to offer respect to all individuals.” Micheline is a member of the Council’s Prevention Work Group.

Sandy Webber who recently moved to the Lakes Region from Portland, Maine is currently a Substitute Teacher in the Gilford School System. A graduate of St Olaf College in

Minnesota, she says her interests are “rooted in education and working with young people and their families”.

While living in Maine, she worked with the Family Crisis Center Hot Line in Portland. She was also a Mentor with the Maine Department of Human Services and a Trustee for the North Yarmouth Academy.

As a resident of Minnesota and following her graduation from St Olaf’s College, she was a high school tutor and worked with the Market Research Department of Sheldahl.

In addition to membership with the Citizens Council, she is a member of the Gilford Drug and Alcohol Task Force and was recently appointed a Deacon for the Congregational Church of Laconia, UCC.

Sandy is a member of the Council’s Prevention Work Group, explaining that her “desire is to make a difference in the area of drug and alcohol addictions”.

The Citizens Council, organized as a County-level initiative that matches tax dollars with charitable contributions and grants, generates collaborative efforts among citizens, consumers, and professionals to promote the well being of children and families in Belknap County. The Council has work groups and task forces focused on each of the three principles of Community Justice that guide the work of the Council: Balanced and Restorative Justice, Prevention, and Strength-based Community Development.

According to Sue Smith, “There are no specific age, background, or educational requirements to be a Council member.” She explains that potential members “need only to be passionate about the well being of children and families, be self-motivated, and willing to work collaboratively on Council-focused activities and events.”

Member applications are welcome at any time. For more information about The Citizens Council and Council membership, one may visit the Council’s website at www.bccj.org or call Council offices at 528-3185.