

# NEWSLETTER

Coalition News

Vol V, #4

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The Northern Berkshire Health and Human Services Coalition is supported by  
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Medical School. The Coalition is hosted by North Adams State College.

December 1990

## December Coalition Meeting

**First Baptist Church of North Adams 131 Main St North Adams**  
Please Enter via Eagle St Entrance

Friday December 14th 10:00 AM to Noon

## Meeting Agenda

I. Welcome

II. Introduction of Participants : **Who's here today**

III. What's Happening : **Announcements by Coalition Membership of  
interest to all**

IV. Coalition Topic : **Task Force on Violence Speaks Out: *Observers  
of the Northern Berkshire scene are noting a rise in the frequency  
and severity of violent outbursts. The Coalition's Task Force on  
Violence, representing the schools, police, health and human  
service providers and others speaks to this issue and invites your  
thoughts about solutions.***

V. Other Business

VI. Adjournment and Conclusion

**Coalition News** is the newsletter of the Northern Berkshire Health and Human Services Coalition. Its function is to keep the mailing list informed of what's happening around the Northern Berkshire area. It's a service to the entire COALITION membership and friends (over 310 at this point). Announcements submitted to the newsletter will reach our entire mailing list. So, take advantage of this unique, free mechanism for informing our membership of news important to all. Please submit these announcements to Al Bashevkin, Coalition Coordinator, P.O. Box 1417, Bennington, VT 05201. For insertion into the January newsletter, your announcements should reach Al Bashevkin by December 27th.

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## **What's Happening I**

- November's Events

### **November Meeting**

With the election over, Coalitioners gathered to discuss the state of health and human services in North County. We heard some rather disheartening news. The financial crisis in Massachusetts has dimmed hopes of new programming and has forced severe cuts in health and human service funding for the past two years. Representatives of Elder Services, Social Security, Community Action, the Department of Mental Health, BTEP, Women's Services, UCP, NBSS, HelpLine, DPW, the VNA of Northern Berkshire, PASS, AdLib, DSS, the Family Life Support Center, and BCAA all gathered to talk about the programming and what's left of it. Clearly, the real victims of these budget cuts are the residents of Northern Berkshire County who have lost opportunity as the result of decreasing government support. Coalitioners left the November meeting with the knowledge that they are not alone in their struggles and will be willing to work together to restore services and programs needed for the area. More will be written about funding cuts and their effects later in the newsletter.

### **Budget Crisis Information**

Hard to believe the election is over, and it's also hard to believe how strongly Coalitioners came through to lobby for what they believed was necessary. Question 3 (Citizens for Limited Taxation question) was defeated by over 4 to 1 in North Adams and fared almost that well in the rest of the Northern Berkshires. Question 2 (looking to cut consultants in Massachusetts) was also soundly defeated in North County. These two defeats send a strong message to Boston about the priorities of the taxpayers of Massachusetts. Services in the Commonwealth are important! Question 5 (offering 40% of State revenues to cities and towns) won, and it is unclear what effect this might have on State services.

Yet the battle for funding for health and human services continues. Efforts are now underway to repeal new state taxes on business services. Health and human service advocates are fearful of who will feel the cuts that will be necessary if more revenues are decreased. State funding for health and human services is at a critically low point, and one hopes that more isn't taken from these services. Stay tuned. If you want to help in the latest budget crisis battle, contact Debbie Weinstein at the Mass Coalition of Human Services at 617 482-6119.

### **Task Force about Volunteerism**

An exciting group of Coalitioners met at the office of AdLib North on November 1st to discuss the needs for increased volunteers and volunteer opportunities and suggest ways the Coalition might be helpful. Some organizations (like Northern Berkshire Support Services) have participants that are in need of volunteer opportunities that will offer real work experience in preparation for employment. Other organizations (like Northern Berkshire Community Action) are in need of volunteers to keep their programs moving. There is plan to put together a manual of volunteer opportunities to be kept at the office of the Northern Berkshire United Way. If your organization has a need for volunteers, or if you as an individual would like to volunteer, then join us. Next meeting for this task force is planned for Thursday, December 6 at 1 PM at the office of AdLib North, 85 Main St, room 304, North Adams. For more information call Pam Knisley (448-8242) or Al Bashevkin.

### **Task Force About Violence**

Northern Berkshire Coalitioners are concerned about a rise in violence as a means to settle disputes. It's a problem we're seeing in the schools, in our streets, and in our homes and it is a problem of astounding proportions. With an increase in problems with alcohol and other drugs, there has been seen a rise in violence. The task force is at work defining the issues and hopes to elicit help from the community in some solid solutions. The work of this task force is particularly difficult as presently there is little hope for financial resources to help fund solutions. So the task force is looking to find new ways to stem the rising violence seen in the area. The next meeting for the task force about violence will be **Tuesday, December 4 at 1 PM** at the Haskins Community Room. ?'s , call Maggie Bittman at 664-6104.

### **Neighborhood Focussing**

The River/Hall/Bracewell Neighborhood Association has been busy meeting in task forces and preparing for its next neighborhood association meeting. That meeting is scheduled for December 3 at 7 PM at the Salvation Army. The committees addressing housing needs and public safety concerns

have met a number of times since October. The housing committee has seen two vacant and vandalized properties secured and the public safety committee has improved the relationship between the neighbors and the North Adams Police Department. Art Kelly and Chris Hunsinger have helped the association enormously by chairing their respective committees.

Hope Cookis, a Smith College of Social Work graduate student, will be a staffer for the Neighborhood Association and will get invaluable experience in the field of community organizing. Hope is initially involved in the project by interviewing neighborhood leaders and also will be assisting with the newsletter. Two editions of the Grapevine, the newsletter of this association have been published. For more info about this project, contact Al Bashevkin.

### **Information / Outreach Task Force**

An old friend has resurfaced. After some schedule adjustments, the core of the Information / Outreach Task Force has scheduled their first meeting of this Coalition season to be **Tuesday, December 18 at 9 AM** at the office of **HelpLine, Inc, 25 Marshall St. North Adams (663-6555)**. Also known as the fun folks, this group has helped the Coalition break some tension and educate the public about worthy causes. Join us, it'll be a memorable time!

### **Counting the Casualties**

What follows is information about the latest budget cuts and the effects they will have on the residents of the Northern Berkshires. This information was gathered at the November Coalition meeting.

**Department of Mental Health** : Marge Cohen (443-7361) is the sole administrative person serving the Berkshire area office of DMH. The 689 group housing for the mentally ill has opened in Williamstown and the project for Adams is still moving forwards.

**Elder Services of Berkshire County** : Elder Services is being forced to implement a schedule of weekly "non-service days" by recent cutbacks in funding. This means that clients will be visited staff members of Elder Services one day less / week. This plan will go into effect Dec 1 and is expected to last until June 30. It will effect services to almost every client of Elder Services. Hopefully volunteers will be available to fill in the slack.

**Northern Berkshire Community Action** : Back in the Spring, NBCA lost its Community Service Corps volunteers that help to staff the office. Maximum fuel assistance allocation / season has been cut from \$750 to \$525 in the past two years. Weatherization programs continue, yet there is no

burner cleaning or repair as the result of those programs. Community Action's Food Pantry has seen some difficult times and needs assistance.

***Social Security Administration*** : In the past few years, with rising caseloads, the local social security administration office has seen its staff fall from ten to six employees.

***Berkshire Training and Employment*** : All programs are presently intact, but with talk about cuts to JTPA (federal), ET (state), and daycare vouchers, their future is uncertain.

***Women's Services*** : The North Adams office of Women's Services can now only be open one day / week. Funding for their transitions program has been drastically reduced. What hurts most for Women's Services programs is the loss or reduction of support services that their clients depend on, including general relief, fuel assistance, voucher day care, etc.

***Salvation Army*** : The local office of the Salvation Army is not very dependent on government funding, yet private fundraising has seen some difficulty in these economic times. The loss of support services that clients of the Salvation Army depended on has made their situation more difficult.

***United Cerebral Palsy*** : The UCP mobility clinic continues to provide wheelchair renovations for those in need. However, UCP has seen cuts in their school based programming, leaving children out of needed occupational therapy and physical therapy services.

***Northern Berkshire Support Services*** : A program of UCP, Northern Berkshire Support Services is seeing a major cut in their respite services provided to families. The future of the functional academic program offered by NBSS for its clients is uncertain.

***HelpLine*** : HelpLine has seen a decline in local support from cities and towns this past year. It has needed to fundraise twenty four percent of its own budget. Services have not been changed in the past year, yet more staff time has been devoted to fundraising as opposed to other traditional HelpLine activities.

***Northern Berkshire Office of the Department of Public Welfare*** : Employment and Training (ET) and daycare subsidies have seen changes as the result of cuts. General Relief for individuals over 45 has been eliminated effective in Dec. Cuts in support from the Department of Public Welfare have come at a time where there are steady increases in client

demand for services. It is expected that medicaid will see significant changes as the result of budget cuts. College Voucher Program has been eliminated. Clerical staff in the North Adams office have been reduced, making the provision of services more difficult. Decreases in staffing and program are expected.

***VNA of Northern Berkshire*** : The VNA's client population is heavily insured by medicaid. With cuts in medicaid looming on the horizon, it is feared this will seriously impact the payment for care for clients with medicaid. School based services for children is becoming more restricted.

***Child Care of the Berkshires*** : Staff for the voucher management programs of Child Care of the Berkshires have been cut. Staff at the Monument Square Day Care Center have been reduced. With fewer subsidies for child care, with a slackened economy that has reduced the need for day care, there has been a decrease in demand for child care services. What is occurring at Child Care of the Berkshires seems like a slow reduction in their services due to the economy and decreasing government subsidies.

***AdLib*** : AdLib's clients are experiencing difficulties because of the cuts in medicaid that formerly assisted their clients with adaptive equipment.

***Department of Social Services*** : DSS has seen a tremendous increase in their caseload during the past two years, creating increased pressures on their line staff. Cuts in services contracted through DSS (open referral / preventive programming) have affected options offered to DSS workers. DSS staff is concerned about the future of all their therapeutic / counseling contracts and day care services they support. Without these pieces, DSS social workers will have an increasingly difficult time helping their clients change and grow. A sliding fee is now in place for DSS services and this fee scale will probably increase.

***Berkshire Council on Alcohol and Addictions*** : Due to the State financial problems and reductions in the Department of Public Health, BCAA has seen a 23% cut in its budget. They have seen decreases in commitments to youth services, and programming in the Pittsfield Public Schools as the result of fiscal problems.

***Northern Berkshire Family Life Support Center*** : The FLSC has seen its referral resource network dwindle, creating a more difficult job for homeless prevention counselors. Confusion about General Relief clients and whether they would be cut from assistance created a quick increase in demand for FLSC services. With increasing expectations on homeless resources, the FLSC

is concerned about the future of its McKinney Prevention resources and hopes that the needs of the Northern Berkshires don't get lost.

### **EDITORIAL NOTE TO COUNTING THE CASUALTIES :**

- Most of the information for the above was gleaned from notes taken at the November Coalition meeting. Our apologies for any inaccuracies that might be present in the above information. If you have questions about the availability of services, it is suggested you contact the agencies directly to get the most accurate, up to date information.
- Talk at the November Coalition meeting raised concerns of health and human service agencies' attempts to continue to provide the same amount of services to clients despite increasing caseloads or a decrease in staffing due to layoffs. It is clear that no business can continue to provide the same quality products or services if they continue to increase the demand on their staff. Coupled with increased expectations on staff are the fewer resources that staff can utilize to help their clients. Coalitioners were worried that despite the good intentions of health and human services staff to serve all who need, without adequate staffing and resources, job performances will be compromised. Long term planning is essential to keep services for clients on track.

## **NEWS AND VIEWS**


### **👤 👤 👤 Northern Berkshire United Way Campaign is still kicking**

... Hundreds of volunteers working in the Northern Berkshire United Way campaign have worked hard to raise nearly the NB United Way's goal. The Volunteer Appreciation Campaign Celebration Report Meeting was held Friday, November 30 at the North Adams Public Safety Building (the firehouse), in North Adams. NB United Way is still accepting contributions to help them reach goal. So, if you haven't yet given, send your donation to: NB United Way, 85 Main St. North Adams, MA 01247.

**🏇 Put Up or Strut Up 🏇 🏇 🏇** Many thanks to all who took part in this, the first of an annual event, a Thanksgiving Day Road Race to assist the Food Pantry at Northern Berkshire Community Action. Over fifty runners competed, and many others sat on the sidelines as couch potatoes, raising food, monies, and community awareness for a good cause.

**🍏 New member of the steering committee** ... Kate Hill, AWARE Project Coordinator at Women's Services of Western Mass, has volunteered to be a member of the Coalition Steering Committee. Kate has been with Women's Services for the past two and a half years. She has a background in


Organizational Communication, Women's Studies, Conference and Campaign Management and university administration, as well as organizing efforts to improve the quality of the lives of women and children. She can be reached at 499-2425. Welcome Aboard, Kate! Others interested in joining the steering committee, contact Al Bashevkin.


 **Notice something different?** . . . Women's Services of Berkshire County, inc. has changed its name to Women's Services of Western Massachusetts in recognition of the regional nature of the Displaced Homemaker Program that serves Berkshire, Franklin, Hampshire, and Hamden Counties. . . Also, the mailing address of the Coalition has changed to: NASC Box 9075 North Adams MA 01247 . . . Also, Sue Grande is the new volunteer Coordinator at the VNA of Northern Berkshire.


**⇒ Questions about the Coalition that you'd like to bring to the steering committee's attention?**


**Coalition Steering Committee members are:**

Neil Novik	Meg LeRay	Al Bashevkin	Kate Hill
Linda Trala	Fred Nicholaev	George Mercier	
Maggie Bittman	Theresa Louison	Al Nelson	

 **OK all you theater activists** . . . Don't forget that on December 7th and 8th, at 7 PM at Drury High School, the Drury Drama Team in conjunction with NASC and the Williamstown Community Theater and under the direction of Len Radin will present the Diary of Anne Frank.

 **For Parents** . . . A North County McInerney Advisory Board has been formed with the goal of bringing the McInerney Parenting Center's program to the Northern Berkshires. Carolyn Burns, Director of Berkshire Center for Families and Children is assembling the advisory board.

 **From the Salvation Army** . . . The Salvation Army is sending gift packages to local servicemen and women overseas. Don't be left out. Contact the Salvation Army (663-7987) if you have a loved one you would like a gift sent to. Also, the biggest fundraiser for the Salvation Army, the Christmas Kettle Campaign is underway. It will go from Nov 21 - Dec 24 (excluding Sundays) from 10 AM until 8 PM. If your agency or group or any individual can help by "ringing the bell", then please let Lt Kevin Stoups know.

 **News from AdLib** . . . There has been a lot going on at AdLib, Inc., the Independent Living Center for people with disabilities in the Berkshires.

Their North County office has moved to larger quarters at 85 Main St, Suite 304. For anyone who has visited their old office they will see they have expanded beyond "closet size". Linda Traia and Roger Gallese now have some breathing space.

AdLib has been doing some reorganization with the addition of Nancy Rumbolt-Trzcinski as the Director of Independent Living Services and Adam Frogel as the Director of Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services. Pam Knisley continues to be the Director of Commonground. This team of competent, wonderful professionals are working hard to find innovative and creative ways to serve the disabled populations in the Berkshires.

Recent successes include "Our Place", a drop-in center for people with disabilities, open on Monday, Tuesday, and Thursday from 5 - 10 and Sundays from 2 - 10 PM. Volunteers are always welcome, just call the Pittsfield office.

As of January 1, AdLib will be a medicaid vendor for Personal Care Attendants (PCA's) . . . This is exciting because this service hasn't been available through an agency in Berkshire County. A toll free number has been added for AdLib to make it easier to call their Pittsfield office from the Northern Berkshires, **1 800 232-7047**. Keep in mind to watch "Focus on Independent Living", produced by AdLib. The show is seen on channel 22 Tues nights at 8 PM and on channel 5 in Pittsfield, Thurs nights at 7 PM.

### */// It's Coalition Supporter renewal time again*

Responses are coming in slowly. Yes, economic times are more difficult, but we all need to do our share in supporting the Coalition. Last year, we saw fifty-five individuals and organizations who joined in support for the Coalition and raised over twelve hundred dollars to help with expenses. If you have already offered your support this year, thanks, and we hope to continue to meet your needs. If you haven't signed up yet, then here's your chance. It's a worthwhile cause. Membership scholarships are available. See membership application later in the newsletter.

### **1990 - 91 Coalition Supporters**

#### **ORGANIZATIONS**

Berkshire Center for Families and Children  
Commonground, Citizens Advocacy Program  
VNA of Northern Berkshire  
Williamstown Council on Aging  
American Red Cross  
Northern Berkshire Community Action  
Pregnant Adolescent Support System (PASS)  
Northern Berkshire Family Life Support Center

#### **INDIVIDUALS**

Esther Tauber  
Dr Len Radin  
Warner L. Smith  
Peg Keller  
Bob Ronnow  
Gale Mason  
Michele Ethier  
Trish Kelly  
Al Bashevkin

## COLUMN

## POST ELECTION HORIZONS

By Tom Wolff, AHEC

November 6th has come and gone and the incredible persistence of the AHEC Coalitions, along with coalitions like us across the state, ended up defeating Question #3. However, waking up the next morning, it was hard to jump for joy knowing that we faced a continued economic decline, a new Governor calling for smaller government, and funding of human services and education that is lower than we've seen in a decade. But as I thought about the future, a series of new horizons for human services and communities as they face quality of life issues emerged.

1. The broad coalitions that defeated Question #3 illustrated our common agendas with business, education, unions, clergy, human services and citizens. These coalitions, along with an enlightened citizenship, defeated Question #3. Now we need to sustain those partnerships and find ongoing community projects that we can take on together. Certainly we need to mobilize that same partnership to sustain our efforts to keep services for the most needy alive.

2. The passage of Question #5 which we all dreaded, in terms of its implications for cuts in human services, does have an interesting twist. If indeed, municipalities end up with a greater chunk of the funding pie, they will have to take on a greater responsibility for funding and supporting human services. Our coalitions are in a unique position to relate to towns and cities on these issues and to expand upon their present commitment to human services (which Barbara Thornton has pointed out to all of us, is really quite significant to begin with).

3. As the state has eliminated area offices, Offices for Children, etc., there is going to be a greater challenge for communities outside of Boston to get responsiveness out of Boston-based Executive Offices of Human Service agencies. That challenge will be one that the coalitions will have to take on quite actively.

4. There is no question that the fiscal situation remains very grim and survival is at the top of the agenda for most human service agencies. We cannot allow the closing of small community agencies. We need to fight the concept of mega-agencies and through it all, we have to make sure that the agencies don't forget the clients. We can't let the fight for survival blind agencies to the needs that they were originally set up to meet.

5. In addition, we cannot jump at the temptation to turn on each other as a solution to the anger that we are feeling. It is frightening to see, in how many communities, there have been vicious pitted battles over the last months of people who should generally be allies. Indeed, one of the most frightening, consistent patterns that I have seen in over six communities is the reemergence of some '60s activists, who now find it a great time to take a shot at those who have been working on solutions for the last decade. The havoc and destruction that these individuals have created is frightening. They have often emerged out of academic settings and take a "dip" into the community only to cause great pain and chaos.

6. A new administration offers a new possibility of hope no matter what their publicly stated position. We can also hope that the legislature does more than "bicker" with each other and moves forward in terms of rebuilding the economy of this state and maintaining and adapting our service system. All opportunities to build bridges to the new administration must aggressively be pursued. We need to bring the Weld administration out to our communities, to remind them of the real needs of the people of the Commonwealth.

7. There is no question that with reduced services, and a declining economy, the greatest challenge that each of our communities face immediately is how to meet the survival needs of our most needy citizens. That is, the need for shelter, warmth, food and basic health care. Our communities will need to mobilize to help people keep warm this winter, have a roof over their head and have something to eat. We will need to bring as much of the community in to that effort as we can.

8. The opportunities to work with grass-roots groups, neighborhood groups, community groups, is greater now than in any time since the late '60s and early '70s. There is a populist revolt afoot and that can only be heard as supportive of the coalition efforts that we have been building over the last eight years. We need to learn how to work closely with these grass-roots organizations to support them without usurping them.

These are just some of the trends that we see in the coming years and they offer some very exciting times as we go back to working with the communities at a grass-roots, community, neighborhood level and as we build upon the successful coalitions that we constructed around the past election. Welcome to the '90s!

# CALENDAR OF EVENTS

- Dec 3** - **River Street / Bracewell Avenue Neighborhood Meeting**  
7 PM Salvation Army
- Dec 4** - **Task Force on Violence** : Haskins Community Center  
Conference Room North Adams 1 PM
- Dec 6** - **Volunteerism in the NB's** : Office of AdLib 85 Main St  
Room 304 North Adams 1 PM
- Dec 13** - **FACT Meeting:** (note new day of week) Haskins  
Community Center Noon
- Dec 14** - **All Coalition Meeting** : Task Force on Violence  
Baptist Church North Adams 10 AM to Noon.
- Dec 18** - **Information / Outreach Task Force** : HelpLine 9 AM
- Dec 18** - **Steering Committee** NA City Hall 1:30 PM

**YES, SIGN ME UP AS A COALITION SUPPORTER for 1990-91 !**

Name \_\_\_\_\_  
Organization \_\_\_\_\_  
Address \_\_\_\_\_  
Phone \_\_\_\_\_

- Ind (\$10)  
 Sm Org (\$25)  
( < \$100,000 budget)  
 Lg Org (\$50)  
( > \$100,000 budget)

Checks payable to AHEC/NBHHSC. Mail to Berkshire AHEC 725 North St  
Pittsfield MA 01201

Areas of Interest :

Are you willing to be listed as Coalition Supporter  Yes  No