

YOUTH AND FAMILY SERVICES COMMISSION ANNUAL REPORT, 2007-2008

Youth and Family Services continues to provide a broad range of services to meet the needs of children, parents, families and senior citizens. Much of the success of the agency is attributable to its strong collaborative approach to solving problems, enhancing services and filling gaps in community resources. Working closely with other agencies, organizations and the schools, Youth and Family Services has become an effective community coordinator, identifying needs, developing partnerships, and finding creative and cost-effective solutions to helping our residents. While Youth and Family Services offers a wide array of direct services to assist residents individually, it has also embarked on a journey to promote programs and activities that build strengths and resiliency in children, thereby preventing problems in the long-term.

This year was one of transition as several agency programs and services were assessed and modified by the Board of Selectman. Restructuring of the agency included the elimination of the Student Assistance Counselors at the Middle School and High School and the elimination of the Drug and Alcohol Counselor. In-school counseling services ordinarily provided by Youth and Family Services were shifted to the schools and augmented by their hiring of a School Psychologist.

Counseling services at the Goodwin School were enhanced this year. Through an Enhancement Grant an agency counselor provided support services to identified students and their families. We believe early identification and intervention services with our youngest of students will prove to be very beneficial in their future.

Healthy Communities Healthy Youth continued to be an effective community initiative after 12 years of operation. After spearheading Old Saybrook's recognition as one of the "100 Best Communities for Kids" HCHY continued to engage students, and community partners in building assets with and for our young people. This year HCHY coordinated the implementation of the "Search Survey" for all students in grades 6-12, which documented many favorable results. Thirty-four of the forty developmental assets (ingredients for success) showed increases. Additionally, we found that more of our children are bonding to their schools, have developed significant relationships with others, are viewed as a valuable community resource and are engaging in positive youth activities. Drug and Alcohol rates have decreased and there is an extremely positive trend that fewer children are experimenting at the middle school level.

As a result of the HCHY needs assessment process, we placed special focus on our high school population. This year a Freshman Retreat was organized for all incoming high school students. The 2-day overnight program at Camp Hazen was an overwhelming success and gave 124 students the opportunity to build skills in teamwork and problem solving as well as developing new relationships and self-confidence. Programs to engage our High School students in the after-school hours were also put into place. Students had new opportunities to become involved in welding, music recording, fitness, fencing and skateboarding. We believe these offerings are extremely important to engage students who might be too young for employment or might not be involved in team sports and/or other traditional school activities.

Social Services remained a very busy program especially with the high cost of oil and fuel. Many families continue to struggle financially, which has created a need for additional revenues to provide support. Generous donations by the YFS Foundation, local churches, individuals and the Board of Selectmen have provided additional resources to allow us to reach out and help those in need.

Our current staff at Youth and Family Services maintained a level of excellence and professionalism this year throughout many agency transitions and should be commended for their hard work, dedication and commitment to fulfilling the Youth and Family Services mission and never losing sight of the importance of helping our children reach their full potential.

We look forward to continuing to work together with you to build a strong community.

Sam Barnes, Chairman
Larry Freundlich, Director

PROGRAM/SERVICE LISTING

Individual and Family Counseling

- ◆ Served 81 cases at the Agency.
- ◆ Served 13 students at Goodwin and the High School.
- ◆ Provided 890 individual and family counseling sessions.

Positive Youth Development

Through these programs young people learn new life skills, take leadership roles and build self-esteem:

- ◆ Youth Summer Stock Theatre Program – engaged over 50 youth entering 7th – 9th grades in an intensive 2-week program presenting “*High School Musical*” before two standing-room-only performances in the Middle School auditorium. Also initiated the Jr. Summer Stock Program engaging 25 youth entering grades 5 and 6 in an intensive 1-week program presenting vignettes from the musical.
- ◆ Youth Employment Service - provided 61 jobs for youth.
- ◆ Wilderness Program – 10 students successfully completed our intensive challenge program.
- ◆ Babysitting Training – 14 youth earned certificates following completion of the training.
- ◆ High School Peer Advocates - 24 students assisted fellow students by planning activities and educational programs.
- ◆ Middle School Peer Advocates – 10 eighth-grade students were trained as mentors and met weekly with 10 fourth and fifth-grade students.
- ◆ Community Service Program – 30 students volunteered several hundred hours to four community service projects.
- ◆ Violence Prevention Week – sponsored assembly programs, workshops, and after school activities for all high school students.
- ◆ Healthy Communities·Healthy Youth – sponsored “*Hidden Treasures: A Community Variety Show*”, “*Main Street ‘Kids in Art’ Show*”, “*Asset Building Mini-Grants*” for Youth Serving Organizations, “*Family Day*”, “*Movies on the Beach*” and “*Youth Art Booth*”.
- ◆ Healthy Communities·Healthy Youth – established the Youth Asset Team at the High School, training 27 students as youth leaders in asset development.
- ◆ Middle School After School Clubs - served 431 students in a total of 44 clubs over the course of the year.
- ◆ High School After School Clubs – gave students new opportunities to learn skills. 63 students participated in 8 clubs in its first year.

Community Collaboration

Youth and Family Services works closely with the schools, police, agencies and organizations to assess community needs, develop strategies and implement effective programs.

- ◆ Healthy Communities-Healthy Youth
- ◆ 100 Best Communities-America's Promise
- ◆ The Juvenile Diversion Board
- ◆ After School Child-Care Programs – Goodwin School and Middle School
- ◆ After School Clubs at Middle School and High School
- ◆ Early Childhood Education Council
- ◆ Local Drug and Alcohol Prevention Council
- ◆ Search Survey, Grades 6 – 12

Social Services

Our Social Services Coordinator continues to assist many Old Saybrook residents in a variety of ways, including emergency food, prescriptions and medical care, help with transportation, energy assistance, budget counseling, help applying for state and/or federal programs, children's clothing and footwear, etc.

This year we provided and coordinated the following to meet basic needs and emergency requests:

- ◆ Received 413 requests for assistance
- ◆ Provided financial aid for 117 Old Saybrook household emergencies
- ◆ Provided emergency food for 57 families
- ◆ Processed Energy Assistance applications for 91 households
- ◆ Coordinated Holiday Giving Program that served 191 children
- ◆ Coordinated Warm the Children assistance to serve 53 children

Municipal Agent for the Elderly

Our Municipal Agent for the Elderly is an officially appointed Town representative responsible for providing the elderly and their families with information and assistance on programs, services and benefits. Senior citizens continue to face numerous challenges, especially as changes occur in their physical health, the economy, etc. Issues of particular concern this year included:

- ◆ Heat and Utility Expenses
- ◆ Subsidized Elderly Housing
- ◆ Medical-related Issues
- ◆ Transportation