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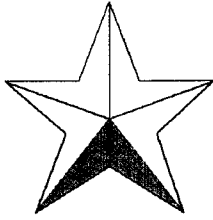
## ABSTRACT

Noting that investments in children are often the first casualties of lean state budgets, this advocacy "toolbox" offers information on the most pressing needs of New Hampshire children and on effective solutions. The toolbox begins with information on advocacy and characteristics of an effective child advocate; specifically, an effective advocate knows the issue, builds partnerships, communicates the issue, and uses a "problem-solving" tone in presenting the issue. The toolbox next presents information on the New Hampshire Child Advocacy Network (NHCAN), including membership and contact information. Finally, the toolbox details the issues and strategies of the NHCAN children's agenda: (1) support public engagement and legislation to ensure the right of all students to a high-quality public education by using valid and reliable research to assess the cost of constitutionally adequate education at a level which ensures high quality, and fully fund the costs through a sufficient and reliable revenue plan; (2) identify and eliminate barriers to the development of housing affordable to families with children; (3) improve child protection services by achieving national standards and increasing accountability of the Division for Children, Youth and Families; (4) expand New Hampshire's safe school zone law to prohibit the carrying of concealed firearms; (5) ensuring adequate state funding for outreach to, and enrollment of, every eligible child in the New Hampshire Healthy Kids health insurance program, based on current eligibility levels; (6) support efforts to raise the state cigarette tax by \$1 per pack and dedicate the additional revenue to a comprehensive tobacco prevention and control program and to state-funded programs that meet the health needs of children and families; (7) increase access to health care for children and pregnant women among ethnic or racial minorities; and (8) support legislation and public engagement that strengthens links between parents, early childhood care providers and educators so all children will enter school prepared to meet their full potential. (HTH)

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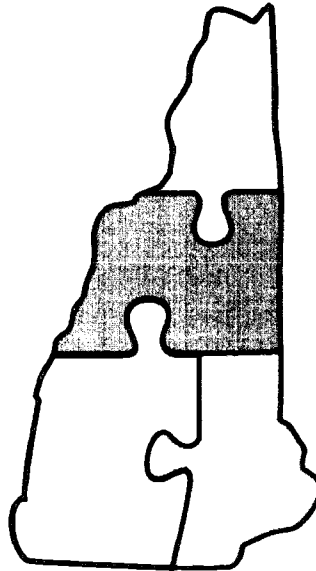
# 2003 Children's Agenda

ED 475 635



## 2003 Priority Action Steps

- ★ Guarantee high-quality public education for all children
- ★ Ensure state funding for the NH Healthy Kids health insurance program
- ★ Promote high-quality early learning
- ★ Improve child protection services
- ★ Eliminate barriers to affordable housing




# NH CAN

New Hampshire  
Child Advocacy Network

Putting the Pieces of the Puzzle Together

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*Ellen Shemitz*

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**Children's Alliance**  
of New Hampshire  
RAISING OUR VOICES FOR CHILDREN

Two Greenwood Avenue, Concord, NH 03301  
tel (603) 225-2264 fax (603) 225-8264  
NHCAN@ChildrenNH.org  
www.ChildrenNH.org

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# Children's Alliance

*of New Hampshire*

RAISING OUR VOICES FOR CHILDREN

Two Greenwood Avenue, Concord, NH 03301

tel (603) 225-2264

fax (603) 225-8264

NHCAN@ChildrenNH.org

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

and dedicated to the memory of Bruce E. Friedman, a tireless advocate for the children of New Hampshire.

New Hampshire cannot thrive unless its children thrive. The best long-term investments we as a state can make are those that improve the health, education, safety, and economic security of New Hampshire's children.

Yet, given the competition for government resources, those investments are often the first casualties of lean budgets. Why? Because children lack both forms of "voice" in the political process – they cannot vote and they don't contribute to candidates and campaigns.

Powerless children need powerful friends. Children need caring adults to advocate passionately and ceaselessly for their well-being.

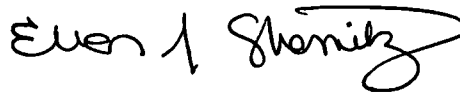
Child advocacy is what the non-partisan Children's Alliance of New Hampshire and the New Hampshire Child Advocacy Network are all about. We understand the competition for government spending and the limited voice of children in politics. We understand that to make a difference for New

Hampshire's children, we need to be clear about their most pressing needs and we need to propose effective solutions.

Children in New Hampshire need every powerful, passionate advocate they can get.

Children in New Hampshire need you.

So please: Keep and use this advocacy toolbox. Read NH CAN's Children's Agenda and think about what role you can play in advancing these very-important issues. Pay attention. Take action. Together, we can transform New Hampshire into the most child- and family-friendly state in the nation.



Ellen J. Shemitz  
President, Children's Alliance of New Hampshire  
Steering Committee Chair, New Hampshire Child Advocacy Network

## Children's Alliance

*of New Hampshire*

RAISING OUR VOICES FOR CHILDREN

### What is child advocacy?

Child advocacy is working to improve the lives of children. It can be as simple as talking to a neighbor or as complex as building broad coalitions to address complex social problems. It can be working individually with a single child or working to change public policy affecting tens of thousands of children. Child advocacy is building community commitment to our children.

### Who is a child advocate?

Child advocates are:

- Individuals who raise their voices for children
- Citizens who understand that New Hampshire cannot thrive until all of its children thrive.
- Voters who understand that children cannot vote, but that children's issues are important.
- People who, instead of saying, "Someone should do something about that," **take action** and **actually do something about it.**
- Part of the solution.

# An effective child advocate:

## Knows the issue

- \* Be informed — read the newspaper, watch the news, attend community meetings. Be sure you know the facts before you speak. And be willing to admit what you do not know.
- \* Investigate Internet resources.
- \* Understand both sides of the issue, so you can anticipate opposing arguments.
- \* Support your argument with facts that can be verified by a credible source.
- \* Learn to navigate the state's website (<http://www.state.nh.us/>), where you can read the texts of bills, follow them through the legislature, identify your legislators and contact them.
- \* Attend public hearings addressing your issue.

## Builds partnerships

- \* Get involved with a group that works with or for children and youth (i.e. Children's Alliance or any NH CAN partner organization).
- \* Organize a campaign in your neighborhood or community to support children and youth.
- \* Reach out to powerful voices in the community who do not often address children's needs. These "unlikely" partners can be powerful spokespersons.
- \* Use partnerships to communicate your issue to legislators, agency staff, private corporations, etc. There is power (perceived or real) in numbers, so communicate how many people are within the partnerships you establish.

## Communicates the issue

Look for opportunities to use the news media to your advantage:

### 1. Write letters to the editor.

Tips: Tell personal stories that touch

readers' hearts.

Present facts clearly and succinctly.

Keep letters short and on a single topic.

Make letters legible.

Always include your full address and telephone number.

### 2. Write compelling press releases.

Tips: Include the most important information first (who, what, when, where, and why), then follow with more detail.

Keep it short and simple.

Always provide your contact information at the top.

### 3. Call talk radio shows when they address your issue.

Tip: Don't ramble. Rehearse in your mind or aloud and get to your point within two or three sentences.

### 4. Form relationships with reporters who appear interested in your issue or who cover it regularly.

Tips: Don't wait for them to call you. Keep them informed when there's something worth covering.

Offer to connect them with information, sources and resources.

### 5. Testify at public and legislative hearings.

Tips: Don't be intimidated. Legislators are people too, and they often need your information.

Briefly introduce yourself and your organization.

State your position (for or against a bill or initiative) up front.

Keep your presentation simple and to the point.

Make eye contact with your audience.

Use specific examples, numbers and facts to make your case.

When possible, offer alternatives such as solutions tried elsewhere.

Always provide written testimony, but don't distribute it until you are finished

speaking, unless there are charts or other information you want to refer to.

Thank the committee for the opportunity to speak. Offer to answer questions.

### 6. Contact legislators by phone.

Tips: Call at a reasonable time: during business hours, or at home after 8 a.m. and before 9 p.m.

Prepare a few key points you want to make. Be as concise and brief as possible.

Introduce yourself and ask if it is a good time to call.

Ask if she or he is familiar with the topic of your call — adjust your comments accordingly.

Before launching into your points, ask where she or he stands on the issue; there may be no need for persuasion.

Ask "Can I count on your vote?" If the answer is noncommittal, tell them, "I'll be watching to see how you vote." End the conversation by thanking them.

Be sure to follow up to thank them for voting the way you requested, or to express your disappointment.

### 7. Write letters to legislators.

Tips: Limit length to one legible page.

Introduce your issue and your position: "I am writing in support of House Bill (number ...), the early learning bill before your committee ..."

Give reasons for your position, supported by credible facts.

If possible, describe a personal experience that has informed or influenced your position.

Tell the legislator how you'd like him or her to vote.

Be sure to follow up to thank them for voting the way you requested, or to express your disappointment.

### 8. Speak out at community meetings.

Tip: Use every opportunity to educate your community on the importance of supporting children and youth.

# Don't be tone-deaf

Here's a lesson many advocates learn the hard way: How you present your issue can be even more important than the information itself.

When someone thinks they disagree with you, and your dialogue is about those things that separate the two of you, you're not going to win them over. The other person is likely to stop thinking about the issue itself and start defending his or her political or ideological identity.

Strongly worded or overtly partisan speech may energize fellow activists and get the attention of policymakers, but it doesn't get most people thinking about solutions for children and family issues.

It's called "rhetorical tone," and it sounds like this:

"The President has betrayed our trust by revoking his commitment to early education," or "The governor is raiding the tobacco settlement piggybank to fund his agribusiness friends, not poor families."

It sounds like, and can feel like, an attack.

On the other hand, when you appeal to people as reasonable folks trying to do the right thing, when you present a reasonable and balanced discussion of a problem, its causes and the potential solutions, they are much better at absorbing new information.

The "problem-solving tone" is one of respect and engagement:

"Investing in education requires long-term planning, not short-term fixes. You wouldn't plan for your own child's college education the way the Administration is proposing to finance education reform."

Criticize the plan, not the people. Demonstrate inconsistency and illogic, not hypocrisy. Show how the proposal violates people's fundamental values.

Another tenet of effective advocacy is that if you do not present a clear standard that your idea should be held up to, those who oppose the idea will provide their own standard.

An example: "We all want our children to have the opportunity to do better than we have done. A refusal to fund public education closes off opportunities for children who attend public schools ..."

These are strong statements. But they do not signal to the listener that partisanship or ideology are the motivations. And they establish a standard – children having the opportunity to do better than their parents – that most Americans will agree with.

The bottom line: Be reasonable, be a problem-solver, speak to those values that unite us, and you'll be a more successful advocate!

*(Adapted from Kids Count E-Zine of FrameWorks Institute.)*

## Resources on the Web

### New Hampshire

Audio of House sessions — <http://www.gencourt.state.nh.us/live/default.html>

Children's Alliance of New Hampshire — [www.ChildrenNH.org](http://www.ChildrenNH.org)

KIDS COUNT N.H. census data online — <http://www.aecf.org/cgi-bin/aeccensus.cgi?action=profileresults&area=31#2>

New Hampshire Center for Public Policy Studies — <http://www.unh.edu/nhcpps/>

New Hampshire Health Data Inventory — <http://www.nhhealthdata.org/index.html>

New Hampshire laws (RSAs) — <http://www.gencourt.state.nh.us/rsa/html/indexes/default.html>

New Hampshire Quick Bill Search — <http://www.gencourt.state.nh.us/ie/billstatus/quickbill.html>

House calendars and journals — <http://www.gencourt.state.nh.us/hcaljournals/>

How the legislative process works — <http://www.gencourt.state.nh.us/misc/legprocess.html>

Josiah Bartlett Center for Public Policy — <http://www.jbartlett.org/>

Senate calendars and journals — <http://www.gencourt.state.nh.us/scaljournals/>

Webster: NH State Government Online — <http://www.state.nh.us/>

Who's my legislator? — <http://www.gencourt.state.nh.us/ie/whosmyleg/>

### National

Annie E. Casey Foundation (national KIDS COUNT) — <http://www.aecf.org>

Center on Budget and Policy Priorities -- <http://www.cbpp.org>

ChildStats.gov — <http://www.childstats.gov/>

Child Trends Databank — <http://www.childtrends.databank.org/>

Child Welfare League of America — <http://www.cwla.org/>

FrameWorks Institute — <http://www.frameworksinstitute.org/>

National Association of Child Advocates: Important Links — <http://www.childadvocacy.org/implinks.html>

Strategies for Children — <http://www.strategiesforchildren.org>

The Future of Children — <http://www.futureofchildren.org/index.htm>

Thomas: Legislative Information on the Internet — <http://thomas.loc.gov/>



# Glossary

**Affordable Housing** – Housing for which the occupant pays no more than 30 percent of income for gross costs, including utilities.

**Assessment** – A child protection case worker’s investigation of a report of child abuse or neglect.

**Child abuse** – Under New Hampshire law, refers to any child who has been: (a) Sexually abused; or (b) Intentionally physically injured; or (c) Psychologically injured so that the child exhibits symptoms of emotional problems generally recognized to result from consistent mistreatment or neglect; or (d) Physically injured by other than accidental means.

**Child neglect** – Under New Hampshire law, refers to a child who: (a) Has been abandoned by his parents, guardian, or custodian; or (b) Is without proper parental care or control, subsistence, education as required by law, or other care or control necessary for his physical, mental, or emotional health, when it is established that his health has suffered or is very likely to suffer serious impairment; and the deprivation is not due primarily to the lack of financial means of the parents, guardian or custodian; or (c) Whose parents, guardian or custodian are unable to discharge their responsibilities to and for the child because of incarceration, hospitalization or other physical or mental incapacity.

**Child Protection Act** – Set of New Hampshire laws established in 1979 to provide protection to children whose life, health or welfare is endangered and to establish a judicial system for protecting the rights of all parties involved in child abuse or neglect cases.

**Cognitive learning** – Learning associated with the acquisition of problem-solving abilities and with intelligence and conscious thought.

**Concealed-carry permits** – Firearm permits that allow a person to carry a loaded handgun in a vehicle or concealed on his or her person, such as under a jacket.

**Cultural competency** – Knowledge, behavior, attributes and policies that allow an individual or agency to work effectively with (or in the case of medical providers, treat), persons of other cultures.

**Eric L.** – A class-action federal lawsuit brought against New Hampshire’s Dept. of Health and Human Services in 1991 on behalf of abused and neglected children, alleging that the existing child protection system violated their rights. The state agreed to a five-year settlement that set in place a series of reforms, with deadlines. The agreement has been extended through January 2003. The state is not in compliance with the agreement.

**Foster care** – Professionally planned services for children who, for a variety of reasons, cannot live with their birth parents or extended families of origin and who are not ready for adoption.

**Gun-Free School Act** – A federal law enacted in 1994 which requires that local educational agencies implement a policy “requiring referral to the criminal justice or juvenile delinquency system of any student who brings a firearm or weapon to a school served by such agency.” Under the GFSA, each state receiving assistance under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) must expel for at least a year any student who brings a firearm to school. A loophole exempts concealed-carry permit holders.

**Head Start** – A comprehensive, federally funded child development program which serves children from birth to age 5, pregnant women and their families. The child-focused program has the overall goal of

increasing the school readiness of young children in low-income families.

**Healthy Kids NH** – Since 1997, the federal government has sent states money to extend health coverage to low-income uninsured children and given states the flexibility to expand Medicaid coverage, create a private insurance program, or a combination of the two. In New Hampshire, the State Children’s Health Insurance Program (CHIP) is administered by a partnership of New Hampshire Healthy Kids Corp. and the state Dept. of Health and Human Services. Matching funds are provided through a grant from the Healthy New Hampshire Foundation.

**Homeless** – Individuals who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence.

**Legislative Budget Assistant Office** – A state agency created in 1953 to conduct investigations, analyses, or research into the financial activities of New Hampshire government entities. The Legislative Budget Assistant is appointed by the Joint Legislative Fiscal Committee prior to the beginning of each regular session of the legislature, and is responsible for the proper execution of the respective functions of the audit and budget divisions.

**Low birth weight** – Newborns who weigh less than 5.5 pounds, and have a higher probability of experiencing developmental problems.

**Multidisciplinary case review** – Reviews of child deaths conducted jointly by medical, law enforcement, judicial, legal, victim services, public health, mental health and child protection professionals to learn how such deaths could be prevented.

**NH Youth Risk Behavior Survey** – The N.H. Dept. of Education conducts a Centers for Disease Control survey of risk behaviors among public high school students. The survey, conducted in odd-numbered years, allows comparison of New Hampshire data to that of other states and the nation.

**Poverty level** – Also called the Federal Poverty Threshold, it is a national income figure that varies by family size and composition and is used to measure poverty. The poverty level is calculated annually by the U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services to reflect changes in the Consumer Price Index and used as a measure of income eligibility for a variety of social services. If a family’s total income is less than that family’s poverty level, every family member is considered poor.

**Tobacco lawsuit settlement** – Also known as the Tobacco Master Settlement Agreement. In 1998, the Attorneys General of 46 states (including New Hampshire) settled a lawsuit with the four largest tobacco companies in the United States to recover costs associated with treating smoking-related illnesses. The agreements called for the tobacco industry to pay the states more than \$200 billion over the next 25 years, remove all billboard advertising and advertising in sports arenas, stop using cartoon characters to sell cigarettes, and make many of their internal documents available to the public. The tobacco companies also agreed not to market or promote their products to young people.

**Tobacco-related deaths** – Among adults, deaths from lung cancer, some heart diseases and chronic airway obstruction are often related to tobacco use.

**Workforce housing** – Housing affordable to families whose earnings are 80 percent or less of the state’s median income.

The New Hampshire Child Advocacy Network (NH CAN) was founded by the Children's Alliance of New Hampshire in 1999 in response to legislators and government officials who said children's advocates were hampered by the lack of a unified voice.

The legislators wanted clear answers to questions like: "What do children need most?" "What should government do first?" and "What can communities do?"

NH CAN provides those answers - and more.

NH CAN is a network of child-serving organizations and advocacy groups determined to drive governmental policy, change budget priorities, and inspire community action to improve the health and well-being of all children and youth.

NH CAN's vision is far-reaching: All children and youth in New Hampshire will live in healthy and nurturing environments that enable them to reach their full potential. The network advances its vision by identifying and prioritizing the needs of children statewide in annual Children's Agendas, by identifying and supporting activists committed to turning these Agendas into action, and by connecting people who work for children with the data and resources they need to make a difference.

Since its inception, NH CAN has grown from fewer than 30 partner organizations and advisors to more than 150, and it continues to grow. The network is funded by the Children's Alliance through individual contributions, corporate donors, and foundation

support. The network is guided by a 12-member steering committee, of which the Children's Alliance is both the founding member and chair. NH CAN is coordinated by the Public Policy Director of the Children's Alliance.

NH CAN partner organizations and advisors (individuals, legislators and state agency representatives) are committed to a prevention-based approach to child health and well-being. Together, participants create annual Children's Agendas in workgroups, vote on priorities at annual Children's Summits, and/or work on one or more Agenda action steps. NH CAN partners and advisors receive regular e-mail updates and alerts on children's issues and Agenda-related legislation, as well as detailed progress reports on Agenda action steps. NH CAN partners and advisors keep the network informed about developments in their areas of expertise.

NH CAN's strength is in the number, the expertise, and the commitment of its participants to improving the health and well-being of all New Hampshire's children. The more participants who identify themselves as NH CAN members, the more visible and effective the entire network becomes. NH CAN urges all participants to identify themselves as a NH CAN partner or advisor, and to refer other organizations that might be interested in joining our work.

For more information about NH CAN, please visit the web site of the Children's Alliance, or contact the NH CAN Coordinator at: 225-2264 or by e-mail at [svarnum@ChildrenNH.org](mailto:svarnum@ChildrenNH.org).

## NH CAN Steering Committee

Ellen Shemitz -- Chair  
Children's Alliance of NH  
2 Greenwood Ave.  
Concord, NH 03301  
225-2264  
[EShemitz@ChildrenNH.org](mailto:EShemitz@ChildrenNH.org)

Jonathan Baird, Esquire  
NH Legal Assistance  
408 Moody Building  
Claremont, NH 03743  
227-9195  
[JBaird@nhla.org](mailto:JBaird@nhla.org)

Charlene Baxter  
Family and Youth Development  
University of New Hampshire  
123 Taylor Hall  
Durham, NH 03824  
[Charlene.Baxter@unh.edu](mailto:Charlene.Baxter@unh.edu)

Tricia Brooks  
NH Healthy Kids  
25 Hall St.  
Concord, NH 03301  
228-2925  
[tbrooks@nhhealthykids.org](mailto:tbrooks@nhhealthykids.org)

Judith Colla  
Hood Center for Children and Families  
1 Medical Center Dr.  
Lebanon, NH 03756  
653-1419  
[judith.B.Colla@dartmouth.edu](mailto:judith.B.Colla@dartmouth.edu)

Gail Garceau  
Heritage United Way  
228 Maple St., 4<sup>th</sup> Floor  
Manchester, NH 03103  
625-6939  
[gail.garceau@unitedway.org](mailto:gail.garceau@unitedway.org)

Rep. Elizabeth Hager  
United Way of Merrimack County  
46 South Main St.  
Concord, NH 03301  
224-2595  
[lizh@unitedwymc.org](mailto:lizh@unitedwymc.org)

Mark Joyce  
NH School Administrators Association  
12 Cross St.  
Penacook, NH 03303  
753-4479  
[mjoyce@nhsaa.org](mailto:mjoyce@nhsaa.org)

Keryn Kriegl  
Families First of the Greater Seacoast  
100 Campus Dr., Suite 12  
Portsmouth, NH 03801  
422-8208  
[KKriegl@communitycampus.org](mailto:KKriegl@communitycampus.org)

Jack Lightfoot  
Child and Family Services  
99 Hanover St.  
Manchester, NH 03101  
668-1920, ext. 145  
[lightfootj@cfsnh.org](mailto:lightfootj@cfsnh.org)

Cheryl Avery Molloy  
Prevent Child Abuse NH  
4 Bicentennial Sq., Suite 3A  
Concord, NH 03301  
225-5441  
[pcanh@pcanh.org](mailto:pcanh@pcanh.org)

NH CAN Coordinator  
Steve Varnum  
Children's Alliance of NH  
2 Greenwood Ave.  
Concord, NH 03301  
225-2264  
[SVarnum@ChildrenNH.org](mailto:SVarnum@ChildrenNH.org)



## PARTNERS

AFL-CIO, NH  
Jessica Clark  
161 Londonderry Turnpike  
Rd.  
Hooksett, NH 03106  
623-7302  
[jlarknh@workingfamilies.com](mailto:jlarknh@workingfamilies.com)

Alliance for Better Child  
Care  
Tammy Hart  
2 Ledgeview Dr.  
Rochester, NH 03839  
332-2945  
[tkhartx2@aol.com](mailto:tkhartx2@aol.com)

Alliance for Community  
Supports/Project Renew  
Gail M. Cormier  
250 Commercial St.,  
Suite 4017  
Manchester, NH 03101  
628-7681  
[cormierlg@attbi.com](mailto:cormierlg@attbi.com)

America's Promise  
Wayne Jennings  
339 Frankestown St.  
New Boston, NH 03070  
487-2349  
[waydarjen@aol.com](mailto:waydarjen@aol.com)

American Academy of  
Family Physicians,  
NH Chapter  
Erik Pollak  
7 North State St.  
Concord, NH 03301  
224-7083  
[rickpollak@attbi.com](mailto:rickpollak@attbi.com)

American Cancer Society  
JoAnn St. Pierre  
360 State Rte. 101  
Suite 501  
Bedford, NH 03110  
472-8899  
[joann.st.pierre@cancer.org](mailto:joann.st.pierre@cancer.org)

American Federation of  
Teachers, Northern New  
England Council  
James Rust  
553 Route 3A South  
Bow, NH 03304  
223-0747  
[nnec95@aol.com](mailto:nnec95@aol.com)

American Friends Service  
Committee, NH Program  
Arnie Alpert  
4 Park St., Suite 209  
Concord, NH 03301  
224-2407  
[aalpert@afsc.org](mailto:aalpert@afsc.org)

American Heart Assn.  
Ellen B. McCooey  
20 Merrimack St.  
Manchester, NH 03101  
669-5833  
[Ellen.McCooey@heart.org](mailto:Ellen.McCooey@heart.org)

Atkinson Academy PTA  
Kate Delfino  
13 Wood Dr.  
Atkinson, NH 03811  
362-4758  
[kdelfino@avon.net](mailto:kdelfino@avon.net)

Belknap County Citizens  
Council on Children and  
Families  
Alan Robichaud  
1 Mill Plaza  
Laconia, NH 03246  
528-3185  
[ajrobich@bccj.org](mailto:ajrobich@bccj.org)

Big Brothers Big Sisters, NH  
State Alliance  
Dick Ingram  
8 Center St.  
Exeter, NH 03833  
778-0277  
[dingram@seacoastbbbs.org](mailto:dingram@seacoastbbbs.org)

Bi-State Primary Care Assn.  
Tom Bunnell  
3 South St.  
Concord, NH 03301  
228-2830  
[tbunnell@bistatepca.org](mailto:tbunnell@bistatepca.org)

Boscawen Elementary  
School PTA  
PTA President  
1 B.E.S.T. Ave.  
Boscawen, NH 03303  
753-6512

CASA (Court Appointed  
Special Advocates) of NH  
Marcia Sink  
44 Walnut St.  
P.O. Box 1327  
Manchester, NH 03105  
626-4600  
[speakup@CASAnh.org](mailto:speakup@CASAnh.org)

Casey Family Services, NH  
Julie Skinner  
105 Loudon Rd., Bldg. 2  
Concord, NH 03301  
224-8909  
[jskinner@caseyfamilyservices.org](mailto:jskinner@caseyfamilyservices.org)

Cedarcrest  
Cathy Gray  
91 Maple Ave.  
Keene, NH 03431  
358-3384  
[cgray@cedarcrest4kids.org](mailto:cgray@cedarcrest4kids.org)

Child and Family Services  
Jack Lightfoot  
99 Hanover St., P.O. Box 448  
Manchester, NH 03105  
668-1920, ext. 145  
[lightfoot@cfsnh.org](mailto:lightfoot@cfsnh.org)

Child Development Center  
of Strafford County  
Alan Reed-Erickson  
P.O. Box 1921  
Rochester, NH 03866  
332-2848  
[are@childdevelopment-rochester.org](mailto:are@childdevelopment-rochester.org)

Child Health Services  
Rob Nordgren  
1245 Elm St.  
Manchester, NH 03101  
668-6629  
[rnordgren@childhealthsvc.org](mailto:rnordgren@childhealthsvc.org)

Children of Sullivan County  
Becky Gentes  
165 Broad St.  
Claremont, NH 03243  
543-3481  
[families@vrh.org](mailto:families@vrh.org)

Children's Alliance of NH  
Ellen Shemitz  
Steve Varnum  
2 Greenwood Ave.  
Concord, NH 03301  
225-2264  
[EShemitz@ChildrenNH.org](mailto:EShemitz@ChildrenNH.org)  
[SVarnum@ChildrenNH.org](mailto:SVarnum@ChildrenNH.org)

Children's Coalition of  
Southern NH  
c/o Region 10  
Claudia Ferber  
8 Commercial Dr.  
Atkinson, NH 03811  
893-3548  
[cferber@clmbehav.org](mailto:cferber@clmbehav.org)

The Children's Place and  
Parent Education Center  
Diane Hastings  
27 Burns Ave.  
P.O. Box 576  
Concord, NH 03302-0576  
226-0507  
[dhasti@hotmail.com](mailto:dhasti@hotmail.com)

Claremont City Welfare  
Brenda Vigneault  
58 Tremont Sq.  
Claremont, NH 03743  
542-7007  
[welfare@claremontnh.com](mailto:welfare@claremontnh.com)

Claremont Coalition  
Scott Johnson  
1 Barberry Lane  
Concord, NH 03301  
228-1109  
[sjohnson@SVCNH.org](mailto:sjohnson@SVCNH.org)

Community Child Care  
Center  
Jackie Cowell  
100 Campus Dr., Suite 20  
Portsmouth, NH 03801  
422-8223  
[jcowell@communitycampus.org](mailto:jcowell@communitycampus.org)

Community Support  
Network, Inc.  
Jay Haines  
P.O. Box 1881  
Concord, NH 03302-1881  
229-1982  
[jhaines@csni.org](mailto:jhaines@csni.org)

Concord Community  
Substance Abuse Prevention  
Council  
Donna Muir

46 South Main St.  
Concord, NH 03301  
223-2023  
[Donna.Muir@verizon.net](mailto:Donna.Muir@verizon.net)

Council for Children and  
Adolescents with Chronic  
Health Conditions  
Peter E. Clarke  
105 Pleasant St., Rm. 108S  
Concord, NH 03301  
271-4991  
[pclarke@dhhs.state.nh.us](mailto:pclarke@dhhs.state.nh.us)

Crotched Mountain  
Foundation  
Donald Shumway  
One Verney Dr.  
Greenfield, NH 03047  
547-3311  
[Don.Shumway@crotchedmountain.org](mailto:Don.Shumway@crotchedmountain.org)

David's House  
Jane DeGange  
P.O. Box 660  
Lebanon, NH 03766  
643-2298  
[jane.degange@valley.net](mailto:jane.degange@valley.net)

Disabilities Rights Center  
Richard Cohen  
18 Low Ave.  
P.O. Box 3660  
Concord, NH 03302-3660  
228-0432, ext. 35  
[RichardC@DRCNH.org](mailto:RichardC@DRCNH.org)

Drugs Are Dangerous  
Dick Gerrish  
1 Deer Run Circle  
Kingston, NH 03846  
642-8839  
[rcg\\_01@msn.com](mailto:rcg_01@msn.com)

Early Childhood Mental  
Health of the Upper Valley  
Cindy Swart  
P.O. Box 154  
Lyme Center, NH 03769  
795-2243  
[cynthia.s.swart@valley.net](mailto:cynthia.s.swart@valley.net)

Early Education and  
Intervention Network  
Debi Bennis  
10 Ferry St., Suite 416  
Concord, NH 03301  
228-2040  
[eeinnh@earthlink.net](mailto:eeinnh@earthlink.net)

Easter Seals - NH  
Patti Rawding-Anderson  
555 Auburn St.  
Manchester, NH 03103  
623-8863 ext. 9201  
[panderson@eastersealsnh.org](mailto:panderson@eastersealsnh.org)

Episcopal Diocese of NH  
The Rt. Rev. Douglas E.  
Theuner  
63 Green St.  
Concord, NH 03301  
224-1914

The Family Center of  
Greater Peterborough  
Susan Knight  
P.O. Box 207  
Peterborough, NH 03458  
924-6306  
[Sknight@monad.net](mailto:Sknight@monad.net)

Families First of the Greater  
Seacoast  
Keryn Kriegl  
Helen Taft  
100 Campus Dr., Suite 12  
Portsmouth, NH 03801  
422-8208  
[Kkriegl@communitycampus.org](mailto:Kkriegl@communitycampus.org)  
[Htaft@communitycampus.org](mailto:Htaft@communitycampus.org)

Families Matter in Carroll  
County  
Rachel Jarosz  
P.O. Box 892  
Center Ossipee, NH 03814  
539-8223  
[FMICC@ncia.net](mailto:FMICC@ncia.net)

Family Mediation and  
Juvenile Services  
Beverly Turner  
16 Academy Ave.  
Atkinson, NH 03811  
362-9957  
[info@familymediation.mv.com](mailto:info@familymediation.mv.com)

Family Resource Center at  
Gorham  
Catherine P. McDowell  
123 Main St.  
Gorham, NH 03581  
466-5190  
[resource@ncia.net](mailto:resource@ncia.net)

Familystrength  
Ellie Stein-Cowan  
Ken Norton  
85 North State St.  
Concord, NH 03301  
228-3266  
[esteincowan@familystrength.org](mailto:esteincowan@familystrength.org)  
[knorton@familystrength.org](mailto:knorton@familystrength.org)

Foundation for Healthy  
Communities  
Shawn LaFrance  
125 Airport Rd.  
Concord, NH 03301  
225-0900  
[slafrance@nhha.org](mailto:slafrance@nhha.org)

Friends of Recovery, NH  
Joseph Harding  
1492 Elm St.  
Manchester, NH 03101  
647-4629  
[joe@fornh.org](mailto:joe@fornh.org)

The Friends Program  
Jim Doremus  
249 Pleasant St.  
Concord, NH 03301  
228-1193  
[jdoremus@rds.net](mailto:jdoremus@rds.net)

Gay, Lesbian and Straight  
Education Network  
(GLSEN), Lakes Region  
Vicki Meyer  
P. O. Box 363  
New Hampton, NH 03256  
[Loonatic@ncia.net](mailto:Loonatic@ncia.net)

Girl Scouts of Swift Water  
Council  
Sarah Brown  
8 Perimeter Rd.  
Manchester, NH 03103  
627-4158, ext. 122  
[sbrown@swgirlscouts.org](mailto:sbrown@swgirlscouts.org)

Good Beginnings of  
Sullivan County  
Ellie Tsseti  
243 Elm St.  
Claremont, NH 03743  
542-1848  
[Families@vrh.org](mailto:Families@vrh.org)

Granite State Youth Mentors  
Mimi Bergere  
15 Constitution Dr., Suite 105  
Bedford, NH 03110  
589-8003  
[mbergere@nhmentors.org](mailto:mbergere@nhmentors.org)

Greater Derry/Greater Salem  
Regional Transportation  
Council  
Patricia A. Monfet  
58 East Broadway  
P.O. Box 1466  
Derry, NH 03038  
432-3674  
[pmrtc@hotmail.com](mailto:pmrtc@hotmail.com)

Growing Places  
Cellisa Hart  
37 Main St.  
Durham, NH 03824  
868-1335  
[growingplace@aol.com](mailto:growingplace@aol.com)

Healthy Minds and Bodies  
Infant Mental Health  
Regional Team  
CLM Behavioral Health  
Claudia J. Ferber  
44 Stiles Rd.  
Salem, NH 03079  
893-3548  
[cferber@clmbehav.org](mailto:cferber@clmbehav.org)

Henniker Parent Teachers  
Assn.  
Theresa Maier  
8 Pine Hill Rd.  
Henniker, NH 03242  
428-3673  
[tmaler@attbi.com](mailto:tmaler@attbi.com)

Heritage United Way  
Gail M. Garceau  
228 Maple St., 4<sup>th</sup> floor  
Manchester, NH 03103  
625-6939  
[gail.garceau@unitedway.org](mailto:gail.garceau@unitedway.org)

Home Health and Hospice  
Care  
Margaret Gilmour  
22 Prospect St.  
Nashua, NH 03060  
882-2941  
[Margaret.Gilmour@hhhc.org](mailto:Margaret.Gilmour@hhhc.org)

The Hood Center for  
Children and Families  
Judith B. Colla  
1 Medical Center Drive  
Lebanon, NH 03756  
526-1419  
[judith.B.Colla@dartmouth.edu](mailto:judith.B.Colla@dartmouth.edu)

HUB Family Support Center  
Mary Sheffield  
61 Rutland St.  
Dover, NH 03820  
749-9754  
[mesheffield@HUBfamilies.org](mailto:mesheffield@HUBfamilies.org)

Immaculate Heart of Mary  
Children's Center  
Susan M. Perry  
180 Loudon Rd.  
Concord, NH 03301  
226-3458  
[sueperry@attbi.com](mailto:sueperry@attbi.com)

Interlocken, Inc.  
Richard Herman  
RR 2, Box 165  
Hillsboro, NH 03244  
478-3166  
[Richard@interlocken.org](mailto:Richard@interlocken.org)

Kearsarge Unitarian  
Universalist Fellowship  
Edna M. Mordecai  
Box 655  
New London, NH 03257  
526-4457  
[mmord1@earthlink.net](mailto:mmord1@earthlink.net)

Keene Day Care Center  
Bonnie Rill  
86 Wood St.  
Keene, NH 03431  
352-2129  
[bonnie@webryders.com](mailto:bonnie@webryders.com)

Kids Can Make A  
Difference  
Larry Levine  
P.O. Box 54  
Kittery Point, ME 03905  
(207) 439-9588  
[kids@kidscanmakeadifference.org](mailto:kids@kidscanmakeadifference.org)

Kingston Police Department  
Chief Donald W. Briggs, Jr.  
16 Main St.,  
P.O. Box 201  
Kingston, NH 03848  
642-5742

Lakes Region Day Care  
Center  
Sara Allen  
David Stamps  
349 Meredith Center  
Laconia, NH 03246  
524-3328  
[dbstamps@dbstamps.com](mailto:dbstamps@dbstamps.com)

Lakes Region United Way  
Bruce VanDerven  
95 Water St., Suite 1  
Laconia, NH 03246  
524-6864  
[uniway@worldpath.net](mailto:uniway@worldpath.net)

Lake Sunapee Region  
Visiting Nurse Assn.  
Jan Sahler  
P.O. Box 2209  
New London, NH 03257  
526-4077  
[JanSahler@lsrvna.crhc.org](mailto:JanSahler@lsrvna.crhc.org)

Londonderry High School  
PTSA  
Lynn Ann Grainger  
4 Watts Road  
Londonderry, NH 03053  
434-7212  
[LAGPTA2@aol.com](mailto:LAGPTA2@aol.com)

Makin' It Happen Coalition  
for Resilient Youth  
LuAnn Oatman  
27 Lowell St.  
Manchester, NH 03101  
622-6116  
[luann@makinithappen.org](mailto:luann@makinithappen.org)

Manchester Health Dept.,  
School Nursing Division  
Elaine Douville  
1528 Elm St.  
Manchester, NH 03101  
624-6466  
[edouville@ci.manchester.nh.us](mailto:edouville@ci.manchester.nh.us)

March of Dimes, NH  
Leslie Formby  
22 Bridge St.  
Concord, NH 03301  
228-0317  
[lformby@nhmodimes.org](mailto:lformby@nhmodimes.org)

Microptix  
Robert Copeland  
594 South St.  
Hopkinton, NH 03229  
746-4887  
[talv56@totalnetnh.net](mailto:talv56@totalnetnh.net)

Million Mom March, NH  
Chapter  
Laurel Redden  
P.O. Box 661  
Peterborough, NH 03458  
458-2666  
[nhmmmm@attbi.com](mailto:nhmmmm@attbi.com)

Monadnock Family Services  
Madeline Ullrich  
310 Marlboro St.  
Keene, NH 03431  
357-4400, ext. 61  
[mullrich@mfs.org](mailto:mullrich@mfs.org)

Monadnock United Way  
Katherine Snow  
23 Center St.  
Keene, NH 03431  
225-4209  
[Kathi@muw.org](mailto:Kathi@muw.org)

National Alliance for the  
Mentally III, NH  
Michael Cohen  
10 Ferry St.  
Concord, NH 03301  
225-5359  
[mcohen@naminh.org](mailto:mcohen@naminh.org)

National Assn. of Social  
Workers, NH Chapter  
Jill Johnson Bardsley

18 Low Ave.  
Concord, NH 03301  
226-7135  
[naswnh@worldpath.net](mailto:naswnh@worldpath.net)

National Congress for  
Fathers & Children, NH  
Chapter  
Michael J. Geanoulis, Sr.  
P.O. Box 45  
New Castle, NH 03854-0045  
436-8810  
[geancfc@juno.com](mailto:geancfc@juno.com)

National Education Assn.,  
NH  
Dennis Murphy  
103 North State St.  
Concord, NH 03301  
224-7751  
[dmurphy@nea.org](mailto:dmurphy@nea.org)

Neighbor to Neighbor NH  
Will Reid  
605 Union St.  
Manchester, NH 03101  
623-0577  
[wsrunc@aol.com](mailto:wsrunc@aol.com)

Network NH  
Chris Zerillo  
P.O. Box 2032  
Concord, NH 03302-2032  
226-7516, ext. 3216  
[czerillo@riverbendcmhc.org](mailto:czerillo@riverbendcmhc.org)

New Beginnings - A  
Woman's Crisis Center  
Kathy Keller  
P.O. Box 622  
Laconia, NH 03247  
528-6511  
[Director@newbeginningsNH.org](mailto:Director@newbeginningsNH.org)

New Futures  
John Bunker  
William Butynski  
29 Hampshire Ave., Suite 1  
Portsmouth, NH 03801  
431-1770  
[jbunker@new-futures.org](mailto:jbunker@new-futures.org)  
[bbutynski@new-futures.org](mailto:bbutynski@new-futures.org)

NFI North, Inc.  
Karen Gincott  
105 Loudon Rd., Bldg. 4  
Concord, NH 03301  
226-2713  
[KarenGincott@NAFI.com](mailto:KarenGincott@NAFI.com)

NH Assn. for the Education  
of Young Children  
Diane Heltmiller  
P. O. Box 3656  
Concord, NH 03302-3656  
225-4856  
[dheitmiller@sps.edu](mailto:dheitmiller@sps.edu)

NH Assn. of School  
Principals  
Peggy McAllister  
41A Terrill Park Dr.  
Concord, NH 03301  
225-3431  
[nhasp@aol.com](mailto:nhasp@aol.com)

NH Assn. of School  
Psychologists  
Nan Clough

Two Eagle Square, Suite 400  
Concord, NH 03301  
225-1998  
[doopy@aol.com](mailto:doopy@aol.com)

New Hampshire Ceasefire  
Chuck Drew  
P.O. Box 494  
Portsmouth, NH 03802-0494  
431-8101  
[nhceasefire@attbi.com](mailto:nhceasefire@attbi.com)

NH Child Care Assn.  
George Thirsk  
South Main St.  
P.O. Box 3495  
Concord, NH 03302  
224-6308  
[nhcca3@aol.com](mailto:nhcca3@aol.com)

NH Children's Trust Fund  
Geraldine Donahue  
Karen Carpenter  
91-93 North State St.  
Concord, NH 03301  
224-1279  
[dclic97@aol.com](mailto:dclic97@aol.com)  
[khcarpenter@nhctf.org](mailto:khcarpenter@nhctf.org)

NH Citizen's Alliance  
Sam Mekrut  
4 Park St.  
Concord, NH 03301  
225-2097  
[smekrut@totalnetnh.net](mailto:smekrut@totalnetnh.net)

NH Coalition Against  
Domestic and Sexual  
Violence  
Grace Mattern  
Linda Griebisch  
P.O. Box 353  
Concord, NH 03302  
224-8893  
[mattern@nhcadsv.org](mailto:mattern@nhcadsv.org)  
[linda@nhcadsv.org](mailto:linda@nhcadsv.org)

NH Coalition to End  
Homelessness  
Roy Morrison  
16 Leaf Lane  
Chocorua, NH 03817  
498-0189  
[morrison03817@aol.com](mailto:morrison03817@aol.com)

NH Commission on the  
Status of Women  
Theresa deLangis  
State House Annex, Room  
334  
Concord, NH 03301  
271-2660  
[tdelangis@admin.state.nh.us](mailto:tdelangis@admin.state.nh.us)

NH Conference United  
Church of Christ  
Judy Lloyd  
314 South Main St.  
Concord, NH 03301  
225-6647

NH Cultural Diversity  
Awareness Council  
Wayne Jennings  
393 Frankestown Rd.  
New Boston, NH 03070  
487-2349  
[waydarjen@aol.com](mailto:waydarjen@aol.com)

NH Developmental Disabilities Council  
Gordon Allen  
10 Ferry St., Suite 315  
Concord, NH 03301  
271-3236  
[gallen@dhhs.state.nh.us](mailto:gallen@dhhs.state.nh.us)

NH Family Child Care  
Beverly J. Lynch  
11 Petersen Rd.  
Brookline, NH 03033  
673-2812  
[PurplePony@aol.com](mailto:PurplePony@aol.com)

NH Family Voices  
Martha-Jean Madison  
NHDHHS  
6 Hazen Drive  
Concord, NH 03301  
271-4525  
[nhfv@yahoo.com](mailto:nhfv@yahoo.com)

NH Head Start Parents' Assn., Southern NH Services  
Susan Wall  
P.O. Box 5040  
Manchester, NH 03108  
668-8010  
[susan@snhs.org](mailto:susan@snhs.org)

NH Healthy Kids Corp.  
Tricia Brooks  
25 Hall St.  
Concord, NH 03301  
228-2925  
[tbrooks@nhhealthykids.com](mailto:tbrooks@nhhealthykids.com)

NH Hospital Assn.  
Michael Hill  
125 Airport Rd.  
Concord, NH 03301  
225-0900  
[mhill@nhha.org](mailto:mhill@nhha.org)

NH Housing Forum  
Martha Yager  
4 Park St., Suite 209  
Concord, NH 03301  
224-2407  
[myager@afsc.org](mailto:myager@afsc.org)

NH Minority Health Coalition  
Jazmin Miranda-Smith  
P.O. Box 3992  
Manchester, NH 03101  
627-7703  
[jazmin@nhhealthequity.org](mailto:jazmin@nhhealthequity.org)

NH Parent Teachers Assn.  
Barbara Moseley  
21 Casey Dr.  
Hooksett, NH 03106  
1-877-701-4782  
[bmoseley3@prodigy.net](mailto:bmoseley3@prodigy.net)

NH Partners In Health  
Hood Center for Children and Families  
Cindi Lapointe  
1 Medical Center Drive  
Lebanon, NH 03756  
653-1489  
[Cynthia.LaPointe@dartmouth.edu](mailto:Cynthia.LaPointe@dartmouth.edu)

NH Pediatric Society  
Sol Rockenmacher, M.D.  
Wendy Gladstone, M.D.

Suzanne Boulter, M.D.  
7 North State St.  
Concord, NH 03301  
224-7083  
[sol.rockenmacher@hitchcock.org](mailto:sol.rockenmacher@hitchcock.org)

NH SAFE KIDS  
Injury Prevention Center  
Dartmouth-Hitchcock Medical Center  
1 Medical Center Drive  
Lebanon, NH, 03756  
653-1135  
[lim.Esdon@dartmouth.edu](mailto:lim.Esdon@dartmouth.edu)  
[Elaine.Frank@dartmouth.edu](mailto:Elaine.Frank@dartmouth.edu)

NH School Administrators Assn.  
Mark Joyce  
12 Cross St.  
Penacook, NH 03303  
753-4479  
[mark@nhsaa.org](mailto:mark@nhsaa.org)

NH Special Education Policy Initiative  
Alice Porembski  
Concord Center #315  
10 Ferry St.  
Concord, NH 03301  
271-3236  
[Porembskis@aol.com](mailto:Porembskis@aol.com)

North Country United Way  
Anne Corridan  
P.O. Box 311  
Littleton, NH 03561  
444-1555  
[ncuw@together.net](mailto:ncuw@together.net)

Odyssey House, Inc.  
Jim Kanak  
P.O. Box 780  
Hampton, NH 03843  
929-3038  
[jkanak@odysseynh.org](mailto:jkanak@odysseynh.org)

Parent Information Center  
Heather Thalheimer  
P.O. Box 2405  
Concord, NH 03302  
224-7005  
[hthalheimer@parentinformationcenter.org](mailto:hthalheimer@parentinformationcenter.org)

Parent to Parent Upper Valley Support Group  
Maryellen Sullivan  
12 Flynn St.  
Lebanon, NH 03766  
448-6393

Parents As Teachers, SAU#6  
Jana Gillespie  
165 Broad St.  
Claremont, NH 03608  
543-4295  
[jsella6105@aol.com](mailto:jsella6105@aol.com)

Parents, Family and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG), NH  
Sheila Dion  
P.O. Box 485  
Winnisquam, NH 03289  
423-6175  
[IADS@metrocast.net](mailto:IADS@metrocast.net)

Penacook Community Center  
Mary Sweatt  
76 Community Dr.  
Penacook, NH 03303  
753-9700  
[PenComCtr@aol.com](mailto:PenComCtr@aol.com)

Planned Parenthood of Northern New England  
Jennifer Frizzell  
18 Low Ave.  
Concord, NH 03301  
225-2925  
[frizzell@ppnne.org](mailto:frizzell@ppnne.org)

PlusTime NH  
Karen Juall  
Terri Warren  
160 Dover Rd.  
Chichester, NH 03263  
798-5850  
[kjuall@plustime.org](mailto:kjuall@plustime.org)  
[twarren@plustime.org](mailto:twarren@plustime.org)

Portsmouth Early Education Program  
Beth Setear  
100 Campus Dr.  
Portsmouth, NH 03801  
422-8228  
[bsetear@communitycampus.org](mailto:bsetear@communitycampus.org)

Prevent Child Abuse NH  
Cheryl Avery Molloy  
4 Bicentennial Sq., Suite 3A  
Concord, NH 03301  
225-5441  
[pcanh@pcanh.org](mailto:pcanh@pcanh.org)

Richie McFarland Children's Center  
Peggy Small Porter  
11 Sandy Point Road  
Stratham, NH 03885  
778-8193  
[peggy@nh.ultranet.com](mailto:peggy@nh.ultranet.com)

Riverbend Parent-Child Centers  
Donna Raycraft  
P.O. Box 2032  
Concord, NH 03302-2032  
228-1551  
[draycraft@riverbendcmhc.org](mailto:draycraft@riverbendcmhc.org)

The Sad Café  
Dick Gerrish  
1 Deer Run Circle  
Kingston, NH 03846  
642-8839  
[rcg\\_01@msn.com](mailto:rcg_01@msn.com)

Seacoast Child Advocacy Center  
Kathryn Adler  
100 Campus Dr., Suite 11  
Portsmouth, NH 03801  
433-8340  
[seacoastcac@communitycampus.org](mailto:seacoastcac@communitycampus.org)

Seacoast Living Wage Campaign  
Guy Chichester  
P.O. Box 4744  
Portsmouth, NH 03802-4744  
964-6158  
[ryeoguyo@yahoo.com](mailto:ryeoguyo@yahoo.com)

Seacoast Visiting Nurses Assn.  
Nancy Thompson  
29 Lafayette Rd.  
North Hampton, NH 03862  
926-2066  
[SVNA88@aol.com](mailto:SVNA88@aol.com)

Smoke-Free New Hampshire Alliance  
Debbie Carluccio  
9 Cedarwood Dr.  
Bedford, NH 03110  
641-8866, ext. 201  
[debbie@nhlung.org](mailto:debbie@nhlung.org)

Success By 6 - Salem Family Resources  
Cindy Jury  
Fisk School  
14 Main St.  
Salem, NH 03079  
898-5493  
[pkpatch@aol.com](mailto:pkpatch@aol.com)

United Way of Greater Nashua  
Don Mattise  
20 Broad St.  
Nashua, NH 03064  
882-4011  
[don@unitedwaynashua.org](mailto:don@unitedwaynashua.org)

United Way of Merrimack County  
Elizabeth Hager  
46 South Main St.  
Concord, NH 03301  
224-2595  
[lizh@unitedwymc.org](mailto:lizh@unitedwymc.org)

United Way of Merrimack Valley  
Timothy Schiavoni  
P.O. Box 8228  
Ward Hill, MA 01835-8228  
(978) 556-9273  
[timothy@uwmv.org](mailto:timothy@uwmv.org)

United Way of Northern New Hampshire  
Rolanda Duchesne  
164 Main St.  
P.O. Box 614  
Berlin, NH 03570  
752-3343  
[unitedway@ncia.net](mailto:unitedway@ncia.net)

United Way of Sullivan County  
Neil Richardson  
P.O. Box 673  
Claremont, NH 03743-0673  
543-0121  
[unitedwaysc@nhvt.net](mailto:unitedwaysc@nhvt.net)

United Way of the Greater Seacoast  
Susan Donahue Suter  
71 International Dr.  
Pease International Tradeport  
Portsmouth, NH 03801  
436-5554  
[sue.suter@unitedway.org](mailto:sue.suter@unitedway.org)

United Way of the Upper Valley  
Jim Tonkavich  
P.O. Box 491  
Lebanon, NH 03766-0491

448-2766  
[jim@uwuv.org](mailto:jim@uwuv.org)

Upper Connecticut Valley Community Coalition  
Francine Bigney  
RR 2, Box 13  
Colebrook, NH 03576  
237-4971  
[francine.bigney@hitchcock.org](mailto:francine.bigney@hitchcock.org)

White Birch Community Center  
Dorothea Kelsey  
P.O. Box 2035  
Henniker, NH 03242  
428-7860  
[kelseydnk@aol.com](mailto:kelseydnk@aol.com)

Workforce Opportunity Council  
Tom Shaughnessy  
64 Old Suncook Road  
Concord, NH 03301  
229-3304  
[tshaughnessy@nhworkforce.org](mailto:tshaughnessy@nhworkforce.org)

## ADVISORS

Rep. David Allison, Cornish  
Jonathan Baird, Wilmot  
Debra Blake, New Hampton  
Robert Chamberlin, Canterbury  
Earl Foss, Concord  
Rep. Barbara French, Henniker  
Mandy Gennaro, Plymouth  
Rep. Mary Stuart Gile, Concord  
Beverly Grenert, Contoocook  
Rep. James Piliiod Belmont  
Rep. Frances Potter, Concord  
Rep. Marjorie Smith, Durham  
David Lamarre Vincent, Concord

NH Bureau of Child Care Licensing  
NH Bureau of Maternal and Child Health  
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NH Child Development Bureau, Head Start Collaboration  
NH Dept. of Education, Office of the Commissioner  
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New Hampshire National Guard  
NH Office of Community and Public Health  
NH Office of Family Services

# 2003 Children's Agenda

## Fast facts

- \* The "adequacy" figure set by New Hampshire for public school education (\$3,201) was less than half the average per-pupil cost across all grades (\$6,738) in school year 2000-2001.
- \* A statewide property tax created to fund education has done little to decrease per-pupil spending disparities between elementary schools in wealthy and less-affluent school districts.
- \* During the 2000-2001 school year, Newington spent \$11,328.22 per pupil and Allenstown spent \$5,455.37 per pupil.
- \* Tax rates in the five Claremont Coalition districts match or exceed the rates that were levied in 1996-97, before Claremont II.



An educated citizenry is a cornerstone of American democracy. The tenet that all children have equal access to a quality public education is fundamental to our society, culture and government.

Thomas Jefferson perhaps said it best: "If a nation expects to be both ignorant and free in a state of civilization, it expects what never was and never will be."

Our state constitution reflects our founders' understanding of the essential role of public education. As stated by the New Hampshire Supreme Court, "Public Education is a fundamental building block of our society, culture and government. The provision of an adequate education to every New Hampshire child is the constitutionally mandated duty of the state government."

The constitution leaves it to the legislature to define, in concrete terms, how best to meet this mandate. In the *Claremont* cases, the state Supreme Court read the constitution as imposing broad parameters.

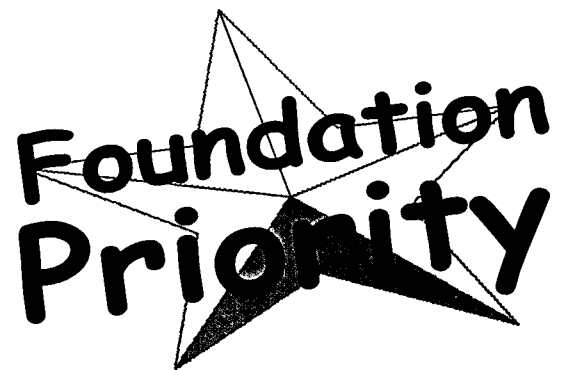
First, that "An adequate education goes beyond reading, writing and arithmetic and includes: oral and written communication skills, knowledge of economic, social, political and governmental systems, knowledge of mental and physical wellness, grounding in the arts, and preparation for post-secondary education."

Second, that neither poverty, geography, disability, racial, ethnic nor cultural factors could justify a failure to offer every child an adequate education.

As we approach the 10-year anniversary of the Supreme Court's first *Claremont* ruling, the

Support public engagement and legislation to ensure the right of all students to a high-quality public education by using valid and reliable research to:

- assess the cost of a constitutionally adequate education at a level which ensures high quality, and
- fully fund the costs through a sufficient and reliable revenue plan.



state has failed to meet its constitutional obligations. Rather than meet the challenge of fairness in public education, the state has chosen to subjugate this fundamental value to the lesser interest of protecting wealth.

How? From 1686 to the present, public education in New Hampshire has been funded through property taxes. Until 1999, those property taxes were locally assessed and distributed. The problem with using local property taxes for education is that not all property is taxed equally. Those communities that contain lakefront or beachfront property, a large proportion of businesses, and/or large, expensive homes are able to raise much more property tax revenue than towns and cities without those advantages.

Students in those towns enjoy better and more-experienced teachers, fuller curriculums, more enrichment options like sports and the performing arts, and schools that are more comfortable and include modern learning and teaching tools.



In 1999, the state adopted a statewide property tax, in part to redress such inequities. But because the state never defined educational adequacy in terms consistent with its constitutional mandate, the tax changes have produced little positive change.

Meeting the challenge of *Claremont* would mean defining the factors that create a quality public education, determining what each would cost in New Hampshire, and setting that sum as the benchmark for the state obligation. It would mean enacting an accountability system that informed voters when school districts failed to deliver quality. And it would hold the state itself accountable for assuring a quality public education to every student.

Instead, lawmakers have addressed the issue of cost by first deciding what they were willing to spend on education, then creating a funding formula that produced that number.

By adopting such a formula, the state failed in its constitutional obligation. Five years after the court's clarifying ruling in 1997, no school district in New Hampshire can meet minimum regulations for education by spending at or near the state-defined "adequacy" cost per pupil (\$3,556 for the 2004-05 budget). Per-pupil expenditures, scope of program offerings, condition of buildings, and quality of learning opportunities continue to vary significantly among New Hampshire's school districts.

Overall, the funding system chosen by lawmakers in 1999 – a statewide property tax along with increased business taxes – produced more-equitable tax rates between communities but not equitable spending on education.

Many of the less-affluent school districts, whose local property taxes had been extremely high, chose in the first two years of the reform to use most of their new state aid to lower taxes. Equalized tax rates dropped in 85 percent of New Hampshire municipalities; unchanged was the 2-to-1 difference in school spending between the highest- and lowest-spending towns.

Indeed, for the 2000-2001 school year, the gap between the highest-spending district (Newington at \$11,328.22 per pupil) and the lowest (Allenstown at

\$5,455.37 per pupil) was more than \$5,800 per pupil.

During the 2003 legislative session and beyond, attempts will be made to circumvent the Supreme Court's *Claremont* decisions, to lower the amount of school funding the state sends to communities and to change the formula by which that aid is determined. Most of these efforts will aim to decrease, if not eliminate, the state's Constitutional responsibility to fund an adequate education for all students.

Some lawmakers have voiced support for a state education aid formula that would target the neediest school districts. Certainly, some schools need more support than others, based on demographics, age of school buildings, and other factors. But targeting aid only works if it is coupled with a guarantee of a quality public education for all students in all districts.

**There are several things child advocates can do to help ensure the constitutional right of all students to an adequate education:**

- **Recognize and applaud efforts to define adequacy at a level that ensures a high-quality education.**
- **Urge community leaders to define the elements of a high-quality public education on a local level.**
- **Urge legislators and the Governor to reject the state's current adequacy calculation, reject any cap on state spending on education and reject a constitutional amendment to remove court jurisdiction.**

- **Urge lawmakers to fund a comprehensive assessment, by an independent qualified examiner, of the condition of all public school buildings.**

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# 2003 Children's Agenda

## Fast facts

- \* Each day about 600 New Hampshire children go to school without a family home to return to.
- \* Fiscal year 2002 saw a 48.5-percent increase in the number of people turned away from the state's emergency shelters because all beds were full. Calls to the state's homeless hotline increased by 54 percent.
- \* It takes an income of about \$65,000 to afford a median price (\$162,000) existing home in N.H. A worker must earn about \$33,000 a year (\$15.77 an hour) to rent a two-bedroom apartment at average fair-market prices.
- \* More than 70 percent of jobs in 1998 paid less than \$14 an hour. Of the jobs forecast to grow the most by 2006, 68 percent pay less than \$14 an hour.
- \* N.H. now ranks 39<sup>th</sup> among the 50 states in housing affordability.
- \* Housing costs (including utilities) in N.H. rose 37 percent between 1997 and 2002, while household income grew at less than half that rate. Rents have increased at least 25 percent in six of the state's 10 counties since 1997 and more than 35 percent in Hillsborough and Rockingham, two fast-growing counties on the Massachusetts border.



Equal opportunity is a cornerstone of our nation. How equal is that opportunity for children whose families are homeless?

Homelessness has become a major issue facing children in New Hampshire and across the country. One in every four people in New Hampshire's homeless shelters is a child. Public schools here identify nearly 600 students as homeless on any given day, and education officials believe the actual number is much higher.

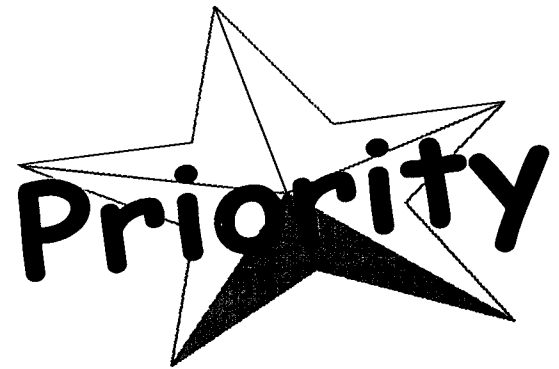
Homeless families stay in shelters, motels or campgrounds. Others sleep on the couches and floors of friends and relatives. In these circumstances, desperate to put a roof over their children's heads, parents leap at the first option for housing. Thousands of children either live in substandard apartments or their parents spend half or more of their income on rent. In those homes, there's little left for food, clothing, child care or health care. Rare is the extra cash for books or toys.

Homelessness devastates every part of a child's life.

Homeless children are far more likely than most kids to be underweight. They are far more likely to develop upper respiratory problems, asthma and even tuberculosis. As many as half have one or more developmental delays. All of these problems are exacerbated by the fact that losing their homes often means losing access to physical, dental and mental health care.

Homeless children struggle to keep up in school. They are twice as likely to repeat a

Identify and eliminate barriers to the development of housing affordable to families with children.



grade, and twice as likely to be suspended. The time and energy most children invest in schoolwork is replaced by worry that they will have no place to live and that something even worse will happen to their family. They are commonly the target of cruel and unrelenting jokes. Homeless children are four times as likely to be sexually abused than are children with homes. They are more likely to be suicidal, to abuse drugs and alcohol, and to have multiple sex partners.

The trauma of homelessness can break families apart. Because there are so few family shelter beds, mom and kids often go wherever there is an opening, while dad goes to a men's shelter or sleeps on a friend's sofa or in his car while trying to hold onto his job. Children sometimes go into foster care.

Homelessness is a disorienting experience, uprooting children from sources of stability: school, neighborhood, friends and pets. Worse, it shakes their trust in their parents' ability to care for them.

It's easy to blame the victims – or, in this case, their parents. Parents living on the edge, working too many hours to provide basic food and shelter, don't have the emotional resources to meet their children's needs. They're less likely to advocate for their children at school and in the doctor's office.

In fact, the major cause of family homelessness in New Hampshire is the lack of affordable housing. Even the presence of two working parents no longer guarantees a family will be sheltered or fed. In 2000, a full-time worker had to earn \$14.15 an hour to afford an average two-bedroom unit. During the same year, the average combined wage for retail and service sector jobs (the sectors that accounted for four-fifths of New Hampshire's job growth from 1997 to 2000) was \$13.10.

The statewide median two-bedroom gross rent (including utilities) climbed to \$884 during 2001 and early 2002, an increase of 8 percent from the previous year's median of \$818. Median rents for two-bedroom apartments in Derry, Portsmouth, Manchester and Nashua have topped \$1,000.

There are two reasons why this problem has skyrocketed in New Hampshire. The simplest is that when demand surpasses supply, prices climb. While about 40,000 retail and service jobs were created in the state from 1997 to 2000, only 3,547 multi-family homes were built to house those workers. In the previous two decades, New Hampshire created between 800 and 900 housing units for every 1,000 new jobs; in the 1990s, building slowed to 450 units per 1,000 jobs.

The other is the wrongheaded way we fund public education. Because schools are funded by property taxes (the majority of which go to the state and are redistributed to cities and towns), many communities resist the creation of housing – especially affordable housing. Taxpayers fear that multi-family housing will increase the number of school-age children and, with them, local education costs.

That resistance is manifest in local zoning regulations that make construction of new homes unaffordable to most

working families. The resulting scarcity of workforce housing then drives rental costs, land values and house purchase prices upward. Families at the bottom of the income ladder, even those who are working, are shut out.

**Child advocates can do several things to address the lack of affordable housing, on the local, state and national levels:**

- **Make your feelings heard.** Most barriers to affordable housing are local. Attend meetings of your planning board and selectmen and support “starter” homes and multi-family homes in your community. Write letters to the editor of your local newspaper.
- **Enlist the support of retailers and business owners.** They need housing for their employees and can be powerful allies.
- **Make sure housing is included in your town's long-term planning.** Don't let any discussion of new industry or retail development end without asking the question: “Where will the workers live?”
- **Insist that New Hampshire create a fair, permanent tax to fund education** so that local planning and zoning decisions aren't distorted by the fear of increased school costs.
- **Make housing a campaign issue.**
- **Urge state agencies to review and revise policies and regulations** that allow local regulations to unnecessarily add to the cost of housing development. Restrictive regulations often include zoning ordinances, subdivision and site plan review regulations, and impact fee ordinances.
- **Urge the legislature and Governor**

to create incentives by distributing more discretionary funds to communities that reduce barriers to workforce housing.

- **Urge the state to provide professional planning assistance to communities** trying to meet their legal obligation to provide reasonable opportunity for the development of affordable housing.
- **Urge the legislature to allow municipalities to link “high-end” development to a certain percentage of more-affordable housing.**
- **Support the creation of an expedited appeals process** through which exclusionary zoning practices can more easily be challenged. Currently, appeals can take up to two years, making them economically impractical.
- **Urge the legislature to increase state funding** for water, sewer and other infrastructure needed to support housing development in rural areas.
- **Urge state legislators and the Governor to put money into the Homeless Prevention Fund and promote private contributions.** Preventing homelessness is cheaper than housing people after they're homeless. The state can immediately reduce the number of families becoming homeless by giving them timely help with their rent, heat or utility bills.
- **Urge your Congressman and Senators to increase federal support for affordable housing.**
- **Urge your Congressman and Senators to support the Housing Trust Fund.**

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# 2003 Children's Agenda

## Fast facts

- \* DCYF assessment workers are able to complete only 19 percent of their investigations within the required 60 days.
- \* In fiscal year 2002, the state received nearly 16,000 reports of suspected abuse or neglect. Less than half were accepted for investigation by DCYF social workers.
- \* New Hampshire's average abuse and neglect assessment caseloads are 40 percent higher and its foster care caseloads 44 percent higher than the maximum recommended by the independent Council on Accreditation for Children and Families.
- \* The 1997-2000 turnover rate among DCYF's most experienced staff was 41 percent -- almost double the national turnover rate. When vacancies occur, already-high caseloads are redistributed among a smaller staff.
- \* DCYF does not have around-the-clock response for reports of abuse and neglect.
- \* In a single day in October 1999, as many as 124 foster children -- 16 percent of the state total -- were in homes where the permits or licenses had lapsed or didn't exist.
- \* 37 percent of foster parents say they call their caseworker an average of three or more times before getting help.



All New Hampshire citizens share a commitment and a responsibility to keep every child safe.

That commitment is embodied in New Hampshire's Child Protection Act. Since 1979, the law has required the state "through the mandatory reporting of suspected instances of abuse and neglect, to provide protection to children whose life, health or welfare is endangered ..."

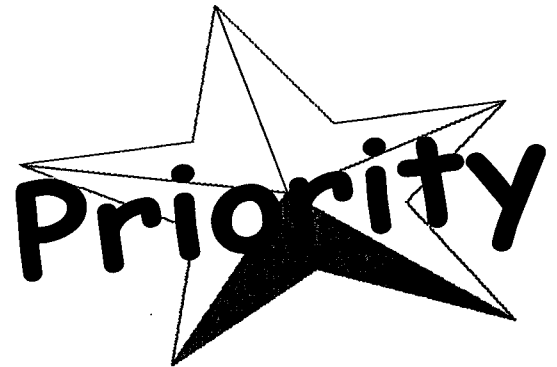
This responsibility is shared by *every* person who comes in contact with children. New Hampshire's reporting law, one of the best in the country, requires *every citizen* to report to the state even the *suspicion* of child abuse or neglect. Enforcement of that little-known law could substantially reduce child abuse.

Unfortunately, enforcement would also drown the agency charged not only with investigating those reports, but also with providing services to maltreated children and at-risk families and with finding safe temporary or permanent homes for abused or neglected children.

Nearly 25 years since the Child Protection Act became law, the state struggles to meet its self-defined mission. Its child protection agency, the Division for Children, Youth and Families (DCYF), is under-funded, understaffed and under fire from opposite directions: those who believe it does not do enough to protect children and those who believe it needlessly interferes with families.

One result of those conflicting pressures is that DCYF does not receive the funding and staffing it needs to do its extremely difficult job. Its social workers have unreasonably high caseloads, inadequate supervision, and a

Improve child protection services by achieving national standards and increasing accountability of the Division for Children, Youth and Families.



serious lack of medical and legal support. Staff turnover, even among DCYF's most experienced workers, is staggering.

These problems, and their consequences, have been reported in numerous legislative hearings and committees, in the Family Foster Care Performance Audit conducted by the Office of Legislative Budget Assistant, and compliance reports generated by the *Eric L.* class action lawsuit.

The tragic result of the state failure to support DCYF's work was most graphically exhibited in the death of Cassidy Bortner. The 21-month-old toddler died in November 2000 after being struck in her head eight to 10 times and punched or kicked in her abdomen at least twice. The medical examiner found bruises or abrasions on virtually every section of Cassidy's body -- from her head to the arches of her feet -- and four fractured bones.

A DCYF worker testified in the subsequent murder trial that the state had received a report of suspected abuse of Cassidy nine days before her death. No child protection worker checked on the child. Advocates and the news

media asked, "Why?" Officials blamed the inadequate response on understaffing.

Though child abuse deaths are extreme – and, thankfully, rare – child abuse is not. "New Hampshire's failure to protect today's children shall reap enormous costs for the state at other stages in a person's life. Much of the publicly funded response to juvenile crime, adult crime, and adult mental illness can all be tracked to early and untreated child maltreatment," wrote the *Eric L.* compliance panel.

It is clear that New Hampshire needs a new approach toward its child protection system. That approach should promote best practices, instill a continuous system of quality improvement, ensure sufficient staffing levels of highly trained and supervised workers, and include the oversight that the legislature, Governor, and the public deserve.

The independent Council on Accreditation for Children and Family Services, Inc. (COA), founded in 1977 by the Child Welfare League of America and Family Service America, measures the organization and management of private and public child protection agencies against research-proven national standards. As of November 2002, two state child protective systems – in Kentucky and Illinois – were accredited. Another 11 states were in the process and 10 have one or more county systems accredited.

COA accreditation is a comprehensive process. Child protection agencies undergo a thorough self-study, on-site review and report in 16 categories of standards. Annual and "incident" reports are required. Unlike other accrediting agencies, COA uses a community-based social services model compatible with the way DCYF provides family services.

The goals of accreditation are improved planning, delivery and coordination of services to abused and neglected children and their families. But the process brings additional benefits: Accredited organizations report improved staff morale, reduced turnover and a greater feeling of integrity within the workforce.

Accreditation would provide both for citizens and for state government a reliable external quality control system, with standards independent of the vagaries of politics and public opinion.

Alone, however, the accreditation process doesn't create a sufficient level of accountability for New Hampshire's child protective services. As a publicly funded agency, DCYF must be accountable both to the taxpayers and legislators who fund it and to the children and families who are its clients. Nothing in the current accreditation process allows public examination of DCYF's actions in specific cases.

For years, DCYF has avoided outside scrutiny of its work by citing laws meant to protect the confidentiality of children in its care. In those cases where children are harmed most egregiously – in fatal or near-fatal cases of abuse or neglect – DCYF should publicly disclose specific information about what actions (if any) it took to protect the child, when those actions were taken, and upon what information the action was based.

This case-specific information should include no identification (beyond that required in current law) of anyone involved in the process.

Only with this combination of independent quality measurement and public accountability can New Hampshire's citizens and leaders intelligently assess DCYF's performance and ultimately

improve the child protection system.

**There are several things child advocates can do to help improve New Hampshire's child protection services:**

- **Urge legislators and the Governor to require DCYF's child protection services to become accredited.** Our water-testing labs, District Court buildings, community technical colleges and community health programs are required by state law to be accredited. Abused and neglected children deserve no less.
- **Urge legislators and the Governor to make New Hampshire's child protection services more accountable** by making public specific non-identifying case records related to DCYF action in fatal or near-fatal abuse and/or neglect cases.
- **Publicize the findings and recommendations of the state's Child Fatality Review Committee**, which seeks to prevent child deaths through multidisciplinary case review, training and education, and data-driven recommendations.
- **Make sure you, your friends and co-workers know New Hampshire's child abuse reporting law.** Any person – including teachers, clergy, health care providers, social workers, child care workers, and neighbors – who has reason to suspect that a child has been abused or neglected must make a report to DCYF.

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## Fast facts

- \* Between 1996 and 2001, 39 New Hampshire students were expelled for bringing firearms to school.
- \* In a 2001 survey of public high school students in N.H., 7.5 percent of the boys reported carrying a gun in the previous 30 days.
- \* Between 1994 and 1999, there were 164 firearm-related deaths in U.S. schools, accounting for 74 percent of all school-associated violent deaths.
- \* One in 10 N.H. adults carries a concealed firearm.
- \* An estimated 80 adults per 300 children are in a N.H. school during the course of a typical day.



Gun-free school zones in New Hampshire are not necessarily gun-free.

Since Congress passed the Gun Free School Zone law, which prohibits firearms within a 1,000-foot radius around U.S. schools, many parents and educators have believed our children are not exposed to firearms at school or on school buses. But a loophole in the law allows individuals with "concealed-carry" permits to bring firearms into school zones with no fear of prosecution.

Most of the 43 states affected by the loophole, including the other five in New England, have closed it by including schools and school buses on their list of places where concealed firearms are prohibited. New Hampshire, where an estimated 100,000 people have concealed-carry permits, has not.

It is simple to get a concealed-carry permit in New Hampshire. Our "shall-issue" law requires local police to issue concealed carry permits to any resident who applies "for proper purpose," appears to be "a suitable person," and is not a felon. The law offers no definition of what constitutes suitability, leaving the police wide discretion. No training, no criminal background check, no fingerprinting and no photograph are required. There is no minimum age. There is no central database through which law enforcement officials can determine whether a permit is valid. Resident permits cost \$10 and are renewable every four years. The same criteria apply to the 3,300 out-of-state residents who obtained a permit by mail in 2001.

New Hampshire requires that school volunteers submit to a FBI fingerprint background check before they are allowed to answer phones or work in a classroom. No such precautions exist to protect children from citizens carrying concealed firearms in schools. The no-weapons policies of many school districts are not criminally enforceable. It's possible a district could even be sued for removing or firing a permit-holder who

Expand New Hampshire's safe school zone law to prohibit the carry of concealed firearms.

brought a gun into school.

Regardless of their views on whether law-abiding adults should own and carry firearms, most people agree children and firearms are a dangerous mix. When they have mixed in schools, it has been with horrific results. We're all now familiar with the names of communities that experienced school shootings – Columbine, Paducah, Springfield.

No school is insulated from this possibility. A high school student in Gilford a few years ago was expelled for bringing a rifle onto school grounds. Because no state law prohibits the possession of long guns in school zones by students, police had no option but to send the boy home to await follow-up by a federal agent.

On average, seven New Hampshire students are expelled each year for bringing a gun to school. Taken together with this student data, the ease of bringing firearms into our schools unnecessarily elevates the risk to all of our children

Child advocates can help create truly gun-free school zones by:

- Supporting legislation that prohibits the carry of concealed firearms on school property or on school buses.
- Urging your school district to adopt a strict "no firearms" policy that includes adults with concealed carry permits. Ask for it to be clear, allow no exceptions other than for law enforcement officers, and be posted at all entrances.

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# 2003 Children's Agenda

## Fast facts

- \* Currently, more than 36,000 children obtain free coverage through the NH Healthy Kids Gold program and more than 6,000 purchase low-cost insurance through NH Healthy Kids Silver.
- \* Approximately 15,000 children in New Hampshire have no health insurance coverage; many are likely eligible for subsidized insurance through NH Healthy Kids.
- \* Uninsured children are more than three times as likely as insured children to go without needed medical or dental services, or prescription drugs.
- \* Uninsured children miss one-third more school days and businesses lose productivity when parents stay home to care for sick children.
- \* Lack of insurance puts a financial strain on New Hampshire safety net providers such as Community Health Centers, where 85 percent of patients earn less than 200 percent of the federal poverty level and 41 percent are uninsured.



We all acknowledge the importance of taking care of our children's health. Yet the health of thousands of New Hampshire children is threatened by their lack of health insurance.

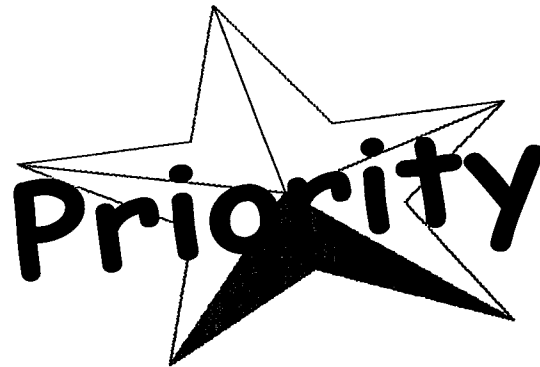
New Hampshire has done an exemplary job of addressing that threat through the state-subsidized NH Healthy Kids program. Since 1999, when NH Healthy Kids began providing low-cost health insurance to children in low-income families, the state has cut in half the rate of uninsured children.

More than 42,000 children currently qualify for free or low-cost health coverage through New Hampshire's State Children's Health Insurance Program. The approach and program design of NH Healthy Kids are proactive and progressive and have resulted in tremendous gains.

Household insurance surveys conducted by the state Dept. of Health and Human Services in September 1999 and again two years later indicate that the uninsured rate among children decreased from 9 percent to 5.1 percent. This has made New Hampshire's program a national leader and is a tribute to all who have worked so diligently to enroll eligible children in NH Healthy Kids. Our state has reason to be proud of its collective success.

Those accomplishments may be threatened this year by increasing health care costs and a growing number of families losing private insurance coverage because of layoffs and company closings. In addition, the state revenue shortfall and the changing political landscape suggest that Healthy Kids may be targeted for eligibility cuts. The reductions we have made in the number of uninsured children will be reversed if state funding in the budget for fiscal years 2004-05 is insufficient.

Ensure adequate state funding for outreach to, and enrollment of, every eligible child in the NH Healthy Kids health insurance program, based on current eligibility levels.



A cut in state funding could mean children now covered by Healthy Kids would lose their last-resort health care coverage. Even level funding might mean Healthy Kids would be unable to continue to reach out to families and maintain its current enrollment. Either would undercut ongoing efforts to enroll the estimated 15,000 children who remain uninsured, even though many are likely eligible for Healthy Kids.

We know that keeping children healthy benefits our communities and our state by:

- Preventing school absences, even school failures, due to ill health.
- Preventing losses to business productivity due to parents taking unscheduled time to care for ill children.
- Preventing increases in health care costs to all, when uninsured families cannot pay for necessary medical care.

During hard times, those parts of the social safety net that we know work well need to be strengthened, not shredded. Our priority needs to be finding ways to simplify Healthy Kids enrollment and renewal, while educating

parents about the value of health insurance.

Research from around the country shows that full enrollment is a difficult goal. Barriers include administrative hassles, knowledge gaps, and the perceived lack of need for health insurance. The enrollment and renewal process itself can be a barrier for families. As the pool of uninsured children has declined, those families who remain without insurance become harder to engage.

For example, many families have difficulty producing documents needed to determine NH Healthy Kids eligibility: current income verification, proof of their current street address, a certificate or record of the child's date of birth, and insurance card (if they have one). If the child isn't a United States citizen, an alien registration card is also needed.

Over the past year, the percentage of NH Healthy Kids applications containing all of the needed documents deteriorated from about half to one-quarter. The percentage of applications requiring three or more follow-up contacts has quadrupled from 6 to 25. The percentage of applicants who never supply the needed documents has doubled from 4 to 8.

New Hampshire has also experienced problems retaining eligible children, though not to the extent other states have experienced. In a January 2002 report, some 20 percent of former NH Healthy Kids families indicated they no longer were covered by the program because it was too difficult to stay enrolled. The same study shows that some families that are probably eligible for Healthy Kids believe they earn too much to qualify.

Family problems and misconceptions are exacerbated by systemic problems, inconsistency in how policies and procedures are applied, and resources insufficient to respond to individual problems. The easy fixes have been made. The "low-hanging fruit" has been gathered. Reaching and retaining the remaining families will require greater commitment and more resources. Our work is not done until every eligible child is enrolled.

**There are several steps child advocates can take to address access to insurance**

**coverage and health care for children in New Hampshire:**

- **Fight any effort to reduce funding for NH Healthy Kids.** Let your elected officials know how important health coverage is for children. Let them know the Healthy Kids program is a great investment – every 20 cents spent by the state buys a dollar's worth of health coverage. Remind them that zero-growth budgeting can't work in today's health care environment.
- **Work with NH Healthy Kids** to provide opportunities to enroll children in your community, as well as to assist families with the application process.
- **Encourage the state Dept. of Health and Human Services** to increase reimbursement for agencies that facilitate the application process for families.
- **Organize an "Every Kid Covered" campaign in your community.** Health insurance coverage for every child is within our grasp if people focus on identifying and enrolling children in their communities.
- **Advocate for policies and procedures that further simplify the enrollment and renewal process.** Join the Covering Kids & Families Coalition workgroups that are addressing policy and retention issues and developing communications and advocacy strategies. You can join by contacting NH Healthy Kids at 228-2925.
- **Encourage medical and dental professionals, schools, child care centers and community agencies** to educate families about NH Healthy Kids, and to assist uninsured families with the application process.

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## Fast facts

- \* Higher tobacco taxes reduce tobacco use and save lives.
- \* Unless smoking trends change, 34,000 New Hampshire children alive today will die as result of tobacco use.
- \* N.H. annually takes in close to \$86 million in cigarette tax revenue and \$47 million from the tobacco lawsuit settlement, but invests just \$3 million of that in tobacco control.
- \* 16 percent of pregnant women in N.H. smoke - far above the national average.
- \* In a 2001 survey of N.H. public high school students, 19 percent said they were regular cigarette smokers, 13 percent said they had recently smoked a cigar, and nearly 6 percent said they had recently used chewing tobacco or snuff.
- \* Every 10-percent increase in the price of cigarettes reduces the youth smoking rate by 7 percent.
- \* Every year, smoking related expenditures cost each N.H. family \$560 in state and federal tax burden.



New Hampshire has a tobacco problem that cannot be denied and cannot be ignored.

Our percentage of middle- and high-school-age youth who smoke far exceeds the national average - some 4,200 children and teens in New Hampshire begin smoking each year.

New Hampshire's rates of death due to lung cancer and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease - both of which can be attributed to smoking - exceed the national average. One in every four deaths in New Hampshire is tobacco-related.

For many children, tobacco-related health problems begin before birth. Girls who smoke often become young women who compromise the health of their infants by smoking while pregnant. An alarming 38 percent of teen mothers (ages 15 to 19) in 2000 used tobacco during their pregnancy. That percentage is the second highest in the United States and more than double the national average.

The longer into her pregnancy that a mother smokes, the greater the chance of a low birth weight infant. Babies weighing less than 5½ pounds are at much greater risk of death in infancy and through their first year of life, and are likely to experience developmental problems.

All told, the health consequences of smoking cost New Hampshire \$302.5 million a year.

Despite these troubling statistics, New Hampshire invests little in preventing children from starting to smoke, or in helping them quit. The \$3 million it invests in prevention is less than one third of the minimum recommended by the Centers for Disease Control.

Ending child and youth smoking is a goal of all who care about children. NH CAN, working in coalition with medical providers and advocacy groups in the New Hampshire Healthy Families Campaign, has a solution: Raise the state tobacco tax by \$1 (to \$1.52) and use the additional \$150 million to prevent tobacco use and meet the health care needs of our children and families.

Support efforts to raise the state cigarette tax by \$1 per pack and dedicate the additional revenue to:

- a comprehensive tobacco prevention and control program in New Hampshire at the level recommended by the Centers for Disease Control best practice guidelines; and
- state-funded programs that meet the health care needs of children and families.

Tobacco industry officials and others have estimated that a 10-percent increase in the price of cigarettes would lead to a 7- to 12-percent drop in the number of teenage smokers. The New Hampshire Healthy Families Campaign estimates that a \$1 cigarette tax increase would reduce the number of youth who smoke by 18.3 percent. Likewise, the tax increase could significantly reduce the number of pregnant women who smoke and save \$274 million in long-term health care costs.

Child advocates can address New Hampshire's tobacco prevention and health care needs by:

- Asking your legislators to support the \$1 tobacco tax increase and to dedicate the revenue to tobacco prevention and health care for children and families.

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## Fast facts

- \* New Hampshire's minority population has doubled in the last 10 years. Manchester's black population increased by 149 percent from 1990 to 2000, while its Hispanic population increased by 121 percent.
- \* Nearly 24,000 N.H. children lived in poverty in 2000.
- \* One in six African-American children in the United States and one in four Hispanic children are uninsured.
- \* More than 70 languages are spoken by students in Manchester's schools.
- \* Of the approximate 15,000 children who are eligible for but not enrolled in NH Healthy Kids, 8,000 live below 200 percent of the poverty level.
- \* Nationally, black women are twice as likely to have low birth weight infants than are white women (13 percent compared to 6.5 percent in 2000).
- \* The cause of death for black infants is four times more likely to be related to low birth weight than that for white infants.
- \* Hispanic children are 2.5 times more likely than are non-Hispanic white children to report only fair or poor health.



New Hampshire's minority population is small, but growing in size and diversity.

The number of children who are Hispanic or members of racial minorities more than doubled in the last decade and now account for nearly 7 percent of the children in the state.

About 8 percent of the state's children — nearly 24,000 — live in poverty.

What these groups have in common is problems getting health care. People who are poor or members of minority groups are more likely than the general population to have medical problems, but less likely to have a primary care provider and less likely to receive preventive care.

The factors that prevent them from getting health care include patients' lack of understanding about the health care and insurance systems. Many poor and minority parents are unaware of the fact that their children may qualify for insurance programs. Immigrants may fear being considered a burden to the state.

Language differences remain another barrier, despite a federal law requiring that health services be made available in languages the patients understand. Some parents cannot fill out basic paperwork or communicate with medical staff.

Even when medical providers can converse with parents and children, they may lack knowledge or understanding of their patients' cultural values, beliefs and traditions about pregnancy, disease, health and medicine — even about the simple act of seeking help.

**There are several things child advocates can do to increase access to health care for children and pregnant women who are among racial or ethnic minorities or who live in poverty:**

- **Talk with members of minority communities about how your agency or your community can best educate people with different cultural backgrounds about the**

- Increase access to health care for children and pregnant women who are among ethnic or racial minorities or who live in poverty by:**
- (a) educating minority communities about the system,
  - (b) increasing availability of interpretation services, and
  - (c) increasing the cultural competency of providers.

health care system, including about the importance of preventive care.

- **Encourage the development and wide use of interpretation and translation services.**
- **Seek private and public partners to fund transportation and interpretive services.**
- **Encourage the medical community to offer more cultural competency trainings related to the specific ethnic and cultural groups that are new to New Hampshire.**
- **Urge the legislature and the Dept. of Health and Human Services to put more resources into data collection, research and analysis.**
- **Encourage local health providers to promote NH Healthy Kids enrollment aggressively.**

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# 2003 Children's Agenda

## Fast facts

\* More than 60 percent of the primary caretakers of young children are in the labor force.

\* Children can spend more hours in child care before entering public school than they will spend in classrooms in grades one through 12 combined.

\* Whether in a home or a center, high-quality child care includes: ongoing nurturing relationships with warm and nurturing care provider(s) who understand child development and the varying needs of individual children; physical protection, safety and regulation; interesting and stimulating materials and activities; and limit-setting, structure and expectations.

\* Children who receive high-quality early care and education are less likely to drop out of school, repeat grades, require special education, or become court-involved.

\* The estimated cost to society of failing to provide at least two years of quality early-childhood care and education to low-income children is approximately \$100,000 per child. The potential cost is about \$400 billion nationally for all poor children now under age 5.

\* By the time middle-class children start first grade, they have been exposed to between 1,000 and 1,700 hours of one-on-one picture book reading. The average for children from low-income families is only 25 hours.



Parents want to provide the best for their children. For most parents, this means more than food and shelter. It even means more than love.

Research confirms what parents have long known: That 6-month-old cooing in the crib needs a lot more than mother's milk and a clean diaper; he needs color, shapes, music, motion, lots of cuddling, and response.

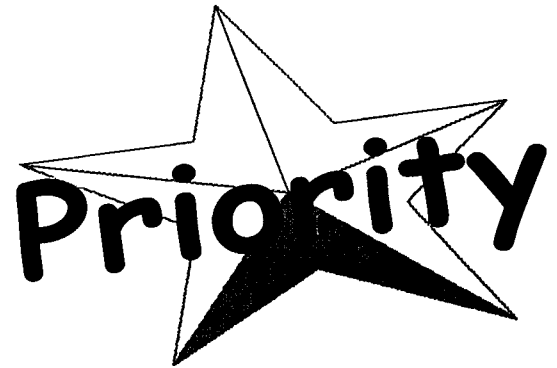
Parents meet these needs in many ways, but while a parent may be a child's first teacher, he or she is probably not the child's only teacher. In New Hampshire, more than 60 percent of primary caretakers of children under age 6 are in the labor force. As the percentage of working parents has grown, so has the number of young children who attend early care programs, preschool and kindergarten outside the home.

Numerous local and national studies during the last decade point to the same conclusion: Quality early learning experiences matter – whether provided in the home, in an early childhood program, or in the primary grades. Research shows that the quality of those programs has a profound effect on children's cognitive and social development and later school success.

Children who receive high-quality early care and education have more-advanced language development, pre-math skills, and social skills. Quality early learning prepares children for school, improves their scores on standardized tests, reduces their chances of repeating a grade, reduces special education referrals and improves their chances of completing high school.

At-risk children are especially affected by the quality, or lack of quality, of early learning experiences. One large study compared two

Support legislation and public engagement that strengthens links between parents, early childhood care providers and educators so all children, including those with special needs or who are impoverished, enter school prepared to meet their full potential.



groups of 8-year-olds whose mothers had graduated from high school. The children who received high-quality early care and education had no more behavior problems than did the children of college-educated mothers. But the children who attended low-quality programs had significantly more behavior problems.

Even so, quality early learning is not enough. Recent research on at-risk children clearly shows that the benefits of quality early learning erode when followed by low-quality schooling. To succeed in the long run, children need a quality education that constantly reinforces their positive early-years experiences, and that fosters the involvement of parents.

Unfortunately, too few programs in New Hampshire seek to link learning experiences from the home, through early care and education and into grade school. Until those linkages occur, the needs of our youngest children will not be met.

Investing in quality early care and education is smart not only in terms of child outcomes, but in terms of dollars and cents. Quality early care and education programs are highly cost-effective. One well-respected study found that for every dollar spent on high-quality early

care and education, taxpayers could save more than seven dollars in avoided public assistance, special education, and criminal justice costs.

As William Gale and Isabel V. Sawhill of the Brookings Institution wrote, investing in early childhood education provides government and society "with estimated rates of return that would make a venture capitalist envious."

Child advocates can take several steps to improve the quality of early childhood programs and to strengthen the links between parents, early childhood care providers and public school educators:

- Support a broad definition of an "adequate education," one that embraces quality early education for all children.
- Urge New Hampshire's lawmakers to promote budgets, legislation and policy that support quality early education, whether that education takes place in a home or in a center.
- Join the Invest in Kids coalition of child care providers working for changes in state policy and budget priorities.
- Monitor New Hampshire's response to and compliance with the federal No Child Left Behind Act, which has important implications for early learning.
- Organize a community meeting and raise awareness about the importance of quality early childhood education. Start a discussion that involves parents, your school district, and teachers at the pre-school, kindergarten and primary grade levels about what children entering first grade are expected to know and how to provide all children with the access to adults, books and the quality early learning they need to meet those expectations.
- Encourage first- and second-grade teachers to speak publicly and regularly about the children who arrive in their classrooms without the skills necessary to learn. Elementary school teachers are potentially the most powerful advocates of early education and they have been silent too long.
- Talk to business leaders in your community about the ways they can support local early learning efforts.

Use *The Bottom Line: KIDS COUNT to New Hampshire's Future* report produced by the Children's Alliance of N.H. to get the discussion going.

- Tell your own story. Organize a public forum in your community, arrange a district meeting with your local legislators, write a letter to the editor of your local newspaper to help business owners, policy-makers, and the public realize that this is a public policy issue, not just a private family problem.

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# 2003 Children's Agenda

## FOUNDATION PRIORITY

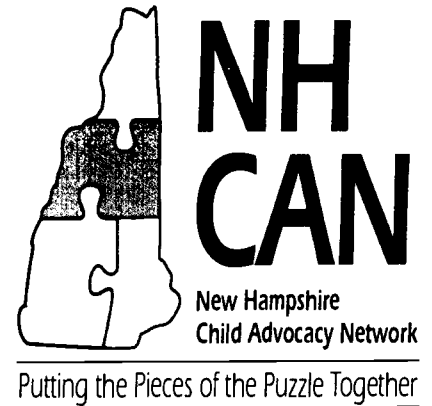
- ❖ Support public engagement and legislation to ensure the right of all students to a high-quality public education by using valid and reliable research to:
  - (a) assess the cost of a constitutionally adequate education at a level which assures high quality, and
  - (b) fully fund the costs through a sufficient and reliable revenue plan.

## HEALTH AND WELLNESS

- ❖ **Priority:** Ensure adequate state funding for outreach to, and enrollment of, every eligible child in the NH Healthy Kids health insurance program, based on current eligibility levels.
- ❖ Support efforts to raise the state cigarette tax by \$1 per pack and dedicate the additional revenue to:
  - (a) a comprehensive tobacco prevention and control program in New Hampshire at the level recommended by the Centers for Disease Control best practice guidelines, and
  - (b) state-funded programs that meet the health care needs of children and families.
- ❖ Increase access to health care for children and pregnant women who are among ethnic or racial minorities or who live in poverty by:
  - (a) educating minority communities about the system,
  - (b) increasing availability of interpretation services, and
  - (c) increasing the cultural competency of providers.

## EDUCATION

- ❖ **Priority:** Support legislation and public engagement that strengthens links between parents, early childhood care providers and educators so all children, including those with special needs or who are impoverished, enter school prepared to meet their full potential.



## CHILD SAFETY AND PROTECTION

- ❖ **Priority:** Improve child protection services by achieving national standards and increasing accountability of the Division for Children, Youth and Families.
- ❖ Expand New Hampshire's safe school zone law to prohibit the carry of concealed firearms.

## ECONOMIC SECURITY

- ❖ **Priority:** Identify and eliminate barriers to the development of housing affordable to families with children.

NH CAN's mission is to drive governmental policy, align budget priorities, and inspire community action to improve the health and well-being of all children and youth.

Our vision is that all children and youth in New Hampshire will live in healthy and nurturing environments that enable them to reach their full potential.

**Children's Alliance**

of New Hampshire

RAISING OUR VOICES FOR CHILDREN



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Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI)  
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