



A Report
of the
Third Annual FBA-NET Fall Forum

Third Annual Fall Forum “Youth at Risk”:
*Innovative Intervention Strategies for the Faith
Community*

Prepared by
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LP Coleman Contracting Services
FBA-NET President



“Unity in meeting the needs of New Hampshire citizens by creating a framework of effective collaboration between state organizations and faith communities.”



Faith Based Action Network of NH

Third Annual FBA-NET Fall Forum

October 23, 2008

Participants

Laura Coleman, LP Coleman Contracting Services
FBA-NET President

Richard Shannon, New Hampshire Catholic Charities
FBA-NET Board Chair

Greg Steelman, The Moore Center
FBA-NET Board Vice Chair & Treasurer

Scott Earnshaw, The Concord, New Hampshire
Stake of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints
FBA-NET Board Secretary

David Lamarre-Vincent, New Hampshire Council of Churches
FBA-NET Board Member

Chaplain LTC Wayne Santos, New Hampshire National Guard
FBA-NET Board Member

Kevin Smith, Department of Health and Human Services
FBA-NET Board Member

Greg Brighenti, Pembroke Academy (on behalf of Michael Reardon)
Panelist

Bethann Clauss, Lutheran Social Services

Br. Paul Crawford, NH Catholic Charities

Amy Dubois, NH Healthy Kids

Ann Duckless

Rev. Chris Emerson, First Congregational Church
Panelist



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Antonio Feliciano, Boys & Girls Club of Manchester

Gary Frost, Boys & Girls Club of Manchester

Ray Gauthier

Liz Hennig, Communities United for Substance Abuse Prevention

Mollie Kaylor, NH Healthy Kids

Melissa Langley, LP Coleman Contracting Services, LLC

Ken Neil, Boys & Girls Club of Manchester

Ingrid Peters, NH Healthy Kids

Naomi Preble, Asperger's Association (Companion Aid)

Kerry Reed (on behalf of George Reed, Christian Science Committee on Publication)

Dr. David Reynolds, Pastoral Counseling Services

Penny Sampson, Department of Health and Human Services

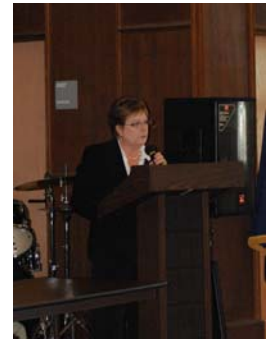
Panelist

Marian Stanton

Welcome

Laura Coleman, FBA-NET President

Laura Coleman opened the meeting by welcoming participants to the third annual Fall Forum and providing a brief history of how the group evolved, its mission, and its purpose. Ms. Coleman shared three poems written by teens.



Peer Pressure

By Brittany L. Gale

A life of lonely time hidden behind closed doors. My body is free to move where it pleases but I'm enclosed in the layers of my skin drowning in the words that I think but my body refuses to say. I am enclosed within my heart and my head my voice is loud within but silenced on the outside. My fears are obstacles that are unobtainable. My soul is dying with every breath my body bares. With each fake word I say my heart breaks a little more because, my true self is trapped in deep space. The space within has no way out no windows or doors the walls are as thick as the walls around by heart keeping me from being me. I scream but it is heard only within the room I am trapped in. The person keeping me here is me watching every word I say and everything I do the person that makes me inferior is you.

A Dandelion's Song

By Jennifer K. Keane

Walking along the path, I spot a puffy white orb-
A Dandelion, a weed.

Infinitely more beautiful than its grassy fellows, endless, identical to me.

I feel akin to this fluffy oddball. I am drawn, childlike.

I grasp the delicate stem, bringing it near to my lips.

Make a wish, a prayer.

I wish for peace in the world, in my heart.

I wish for love, true love.

I wish for direction, hope.

I blow with all my breath, wish with all my being.

Disperse miniature white parachutes.

In my mind- I too detach.

In a million different directions, I am the hopes, the dreams, the prayers, the wishes of a world, a generation, my peers, my family, Myself.

I am Blown.

Carried by a passing breeze soft, gentle, then -

grabbed by a far more violent gust I fall, tumble, rise, twist, change directions.

I have traveled far, have far yet to travel. Not sure how far.

I Am Not Lost.

Just searching for a purpose, a reason, an answer, a place to land, to stay- to take root.

Growing Up

By Melissa S. Rawls

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Life is so easy when you are young,
When kisses heal boo-boos and lullabies are sung.
It seemed that life could go on for years,
as long as the nightlight was there
to quiet our fears.

Why does growing up have to be so hard?
When did the world become bigger than our own back yard?
There is no more recess to stop the stress of the school day.
There are no more falling stars that can take our worries away.
Decisions are more complicated now that we are grown,
why can't we go back to when life was our own?

Opening Remarks

Kevin Smith, Senior Administrator, Division for Juvenile Justice Services



Kevin Smith, Board Member of FBA-NET opened the meeting by sharing the importance of perceiving juvenile delinquents as "kids with promise" rather than "kids at risk." The Division for Juvenile Justice is using faith-based interventions as a treatment tool because several scientific studies substantiate the value of these interventions as protective factors in a youth's life.

Mr. Smith shared that the Division for Juvenile Justice has employed the services of three part-time Chaplains for the Youth Services Center. Chaplain Donnie Brown, Chaplain Ray Gauthier, and Chaplain Grace Rosado assist in conducting a spiritual evaluation for each resident at in-take, provide requested chaplain-related services to the residents of the Youth Services Center, and recruit outside inter-faith volunteers to mentor and build positive relationships with the youth at the facility. Mr. Smith also added that while the spiritual component is viewed as a valuable asset to the resident's overall treatment plan, for obvious reasons, participation in the faith-based counseling is voluntary, though most residents choose to participate.



Chaplain Rev. Donnie Brown

To kick off the forum event, Mr. Smith introduced three teen residents at the Youth Services Center, two of whom performed the song "I believe I can Fly" and one shared a brief testimony about being an at-risk youth, his experience working with the Chaplains, and his interest in getting involved with the faith group at the Youth Services Center.

Reflections From The Field



Panelists: (Left to right) Greg Brighenti, Assistant Principal Pembroke Academy, Reverend Chris Emerson, Senior Pastor of First Congregational Church in Manchester, Penny Sampson, Director of Clinical Services at the Manchester Youth Development Center.

Three presenters shared their perspectives on challenges and issues facing youth at home, in the community, and at school along with their thoughts about the unique and important role the faith community plays in each setting. What follows are highlights from their presentations.

Penny Sampson provided a general overview of factors that influence youth today, naming media and peer pressure as two of the most prominent. Youth are exposed to a great deal of information to process through media. Additionally, they struggle each day dealing with the pressures they face from their friends and peers they come in contact with. Ms. Sampson shared the importance of providing youth with free time for them to process and reflect. She shared that youth need to be allowed to have “hanging around” time. She shared how youth with no adult mentors in their lives experience situational morality. Youth who are truly integrated within themselves can be themselves in any situation, regardless of who they are, with or what environment they are in.

Ms. Sampson stressed the importance of protective risk factors relative to the faith community. Youth need a connection to God. She shared a story of a girl who was experiencing abuse in her home. The only thing that rescued her from her abusive environment and abuser on a regular basis was a Church bus that came every week to pick her up to take her to church. This was her escape from the abuse.

Several factors place youth at risk. Factors include poor attachment, poverty, single parent households, learning disorders, chronic conflicts at home and in the neighborhood, and peer pressure. The following are possible responses from the faith community:

1. Engaging youth through ministries
2. Parenting classes
3. Involving families in Church
4. Neighborhood intercession (telling the youth how great they are)
5. Interfaith and prayer is a strong protective factor
6. Connection to God
7. Need to have “hanging around time”

Chris Emerson shared that he has worked with youth for 35 years. From his early work at a school for boys, to his current role as senior pastor at the First Congregational Church in Manchester; Reverend Emerson has never lost his care, concern or vision for youth. He is also actively involved in community outreach work in Manchester. Reverend Emerson shared a framework

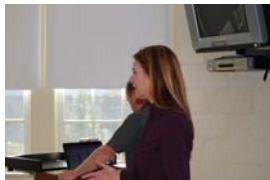
for understanding spiritual development developed by the Center for Spiritual Development at the Search Institute, which is broken down into three core developmental processes. They are: 1) Awareness or Awakening - Adults are witnesses to their definition of growth and awakening; 2) Interconnecting and belonging; and 3) A way of living. He shared that congregations are neighborhood systems. In a world where most neighborhoods are long gone, being part of a neighborhood is a vital component of social and individual health. Youth need contact and familiarity with older adults. Insofar as high schools are homogeneous “gated communities,” youth need to be an integral part of a multi-generational community, a neighborhood, a congregation. Based on the work of Dr. Ethan Berke, Reverend Emerson shared that similarities exist between youth and senior citizen. Both groups need to be able to access community organizations and have stable relationship. They are unlikely to admit need and they often feel overwhelmed with the world around them for different reasons.

Families and youth need a sense of belonging. They need to feel they have a safe place to go, to be a part of. Reverend Emerson shared that congregations are neighborhoods for youth in which they gain experience in how to function, express and extend themselves with security and confidence. They shouldn't be sent out into the world without having an opportunity to explore and test new behaviors. Churches provide the safe environment for them to test new behaviors and experience the responses. They need to be and feel connected and assured before they go out into the real world on their own. The Church is the “rehearsal zone.” It provides opportunities for them through outreach and mission. Reverend Emerson shared several ideas for getting youth connected in church and in communities. These include block parties, connecting kids in Church to a diverse group (homeless, etc.), cultural camps-kids from different backgrounds coming together, and rehab projects for the youth.

Greg Brighenti echoed the comments from the other two panelists and added the struggle educators face trying to educate while having to address the challenges and issues youth are dealing with on a daily basis. Mr. Brighenti introduced a video presentation by Michael Reardon, Headmaster at Pinkerton Academy that was created specifically for the Fall Forum. In the video, Dr. Reardon presents the issues

Breakout Discussions by Topic

Three breakout sessions were offered to participants focusing on home, community, and schools. What follows are highlights from the discussions that occurred within each break out session:



Home
Presenter/Facilitator
Penny Sampson

Ms. Sampson presented several family risk factors. These include pregnancy, fetal substance during pregnancy, poor attachment, long maternal absence, poverty, crowded families and single

parenthood. Risk factors for children include developmental delays, head injuries, behaviorally inhibited, mental retardation, serious medical problems, early aggression <6, early substance abuse <12, learning disorders, negative peers, neglect and abuse, chronic violence in the home and neighborhood, and parent conflict. Ms. Sampson talked about the need among 13-18 year olds for space and time to process their world around them. They need to reflect on their choices, behavior, challenges, and problem solving. They need development and relationships more than programming. Protective responses are to identify “reflective opportunities” for youth (all ages) to have time (without distraction) to “find themselves.”

Ms. Sampson shared that a study conducted on 400-500 youth showed a significant percent that had no involvement in Church. Churches need to reach out to youth. They can hold parent retreats- family oriented/focused workshops on risk factors, and things to positively respond to them. They can organize fun nights with parents and youth.

Several in the breakout group shared opportunities and efforts underway that focus on youth. The Chaplain for NH National Guard shared that connecting youth to the military opportunities is important. Currently, more than 200 come together monthly in the Patriot program for military training. This is geared for youth who are too young for active duty. The executive director of the Boys and Girls Club shared that programs offered by his organization and others such as Lutheran Social Services target youth, and there are new emerging initiatives underway working with families. The Chaplain from Straight Ahead Ministries shared that this ministry provides counseling services to people incarcerated. Currently, the group is looking at establishing a home for delinquent boys. They are currently exploring options for purchasing the old Boylston Home that is for sale. A schoolteacher at a Concord School shared that the Concord School District is outreach focused. Schools see the importance of reaching out to the community. A representative of the Christian Science Church shared the importance of participating in the Inter-faith group in Manchester and FBA-NET.

Ms. Sampson shared several protective factors including, but not limited to, the following:

- 1st born child
- Outgoing
- Humor
- Sense of community
- Reading ability
- Routines/rituals/rules
- Attachment to mother
- Warm relationship with parents
- Availability of social supports-parents
- Parental employment
- Involvement in religion
- Teaching kids to have hobbies
- Care giving, job, volunteerism
- Adult mentors
- Learning in the school setting
- Problem solving skills
- Counter media messages



Community
Presenter/Facilitator
Rev. Chris Emerson

Although the group discussion began with an inquiry regarding successful faith based services aimed at youth-at-risk, the discussion quickly shifted to a discussion about forming relationships with New Hampshire churches. Several success stories were offered. Specific questions raised focused on experiences people have had (and more commonly NOT had) with outreach to faith-based groups. It was noted that most churches that do have specific outreach to youth-at-risk, do this as a faith ministry for members of their own congregation. Rarely do churches look to the community and actively participate in meeting the needs of the youth-at-risk.

It was suggested that success in reaching out is because of relationships and mindset. As staff of a program, you naturally expect people to come to you and respond to your requests for partnerships. This is not the way churches work, including churches of racial/ethnic/language minorities. It is important to visit faith communities to build relationships with them prior to making an offer of collaboration. This is much more labor intensive, but more likely to succeed. The alternative is to find highly motivated volunteers for your organization who are also members of the church and ask that they bring the initiative to the church's attention.

The discussion moved to ways to from a lament or blame frame to a positive frame that would enable measurable progress toward building relationships, helping churches be more robust members of the community, etc. Ways to connect include mobile food/clothing drives, church gardens, community meals, and working with youth-at-risk, youth directed-soul café performances, parenting education via other organizations, Adult Ed, Parent-Child centers/program, members invite neighbors.



School
Presenter/Facilitator
Greg Brighenti

Mr. Brighenti started with stating that kids need help. The drop out age is rising to 18. He further stated that 28 kids dropped out of Pembroke Academy last year, which is 2.6% of the total school enrollment. These are by definition the most at-risk kids.

Mr. Brighenti shared that 15-20 kids work with the schools at-risk coordinator. The at-risk coordinator's role is to link kids in school to the community. Last year, 10-12 students were in this program and two dropped out.

Ken Neil from the Boys & Girls Club of Manchester brings 30 years experience working with youth and stated that they need help long before high school. Boys & Girls Clubs run after school programs in two middle schools. He feels that there is a need for information sharing between after-school programs and schools, and that school districts need to be more open to the community in a greater way. In addition, conflict exists between school schedules and parental work schedules.

Mr. Brighenti shared that programs like the Boys & Girls Club are difficult to get going. One of the biggest pushes in education has been in promoting a sense of belonging for students in schools. Mr. Neil shared that one key thing that separates kids who wind up in juvenile detention are kids that lack empathy. Greg Steelman shared that other factors include professionalization of teaching, the lack of role models for non-college bound youth, and learning styles of youth (Sit down learning style doesn't fit boys).

Mr. Brighenti shared that he has witnessed successful initiatives for matching students at risk with community members. Elements include bringing faith into the classroom and promoting discussions around different faiths, and having youth groups in buildings run by Church's and faith groups. Groups that seek to engage youth in the schools should be led and directed by students. Pembroke Academy welcomes community groups to engage youth. There is disparity however as some groups seem to be welcome in some places and not others. It was noted that schools and faith leaders should promote discussion about faith and religion without proselytizing.

Panel Discussion



After a networking lunch, breakout presenters Penny Sampson, Reverend Chris Emerson, and Greg Brighenti responded to questions and comments raised by participants. The following nuggets were identified from the discussion:

- The faith community has tremendous networks that can be tapped into
- It is important to go out and find the youth. Go to them. Reach out to them in ways that are comfortable for them
- Find ways to help parents and adults interact with youth rather than be afraid of them
- Create zones when they can be comfortable
- Bring together the network of the community including youth rising strategic prevention framework

- Build relationships within the community and hear what they say their needs, wants, desires, and ideas are
- Find ways to “meet in the middle” with community organizations, faith organization (all sectors represented)
- Churches can share a list of ways students can get involved with schools (i.e. opportunities for community service projects, groups, etc.)
- Identify/match community service projects that align to youth interest
- Each sector should be respectful of each other (schools respectful of the church’s process and focus and churches respectful of the limitations of schools)
- Explore and identify effective teaching/learning opportunities for teaching youth positive behaviors
- Explore opportunities to collaborate with schools to establish mentor “teams” that are representative of “safe” and engaging community leaders/organizations (i.e. faith leaders, big brother, big sister, social service providers, etc.)
- Embrace faith and go for engaging the community in proactive change-meeting people where they are at

Closing Remarks

Richard Shannon, FBA-Net Board chair provided closing remarks. Laura Coleman closed by introducing current board members who were present and extending appreciation to everyone who attended the 2008 Fall Forum.