

# UNIVERSITY of NEW HAMPSHIRE

*“Excellence in Outreach Scholarship”*

## *Outreach Scholars Academy*

### **Project Information**

**Rick Alleva, Ed.D.**

**Extension Educator  
UNH Cooperative Extension  
[rick.alleva@unh.edu](mailto:rick.alleva@unh.edu)**

#### **1. PROJECT TITLE**

Seacoast Youth Services: Building & Sustaining a Positive Youth Development Center

#### **2. PROJECT DESCRIPTION**

UNH Cooperative Extension (UNHCE) has partnered with Seacoast Youth Services (SYS), a non-profit community organization in the town of Seabrook, to establish and support a positive youth development center in the lower seacoast area of New Hampshire. A mutual beneficial relationship between UNHCE and SYS has included the provision of quality youth programs, diverse youth and family involvement, hands-on internship placements, federal and local grant support, national conference participation & workshop presentations, and a growing community-based coalition with UNH as a primary partner with local community agencies.

Since the project’s initiation in 2003, my particular role has involved a diversity of tasks, including program design/logic model development, best practice demonstration programming, staff training and supervision, mobilization of and connection with UNH and other resources, local/national grant development, program evaluation/reporting, and other technical assistance. My current project focus is to sustain the quality youth program activities at SYS as we enter the final year of a supporting five-year federal grant, and to expand documentation and dissemination of the overall community youth development experience to a wider academic, professional and public audience.

#### **3. BACKGROUND INFORMATION/STATEMENT OF THE ISSUES/PROBLEM**

Many Seabrook and Hampton area youth experience challenges that present a significant barrier to a successful transition to adult community life. Seabrook has one of the highest unemployment and high school drop out rates in NH, and Hampton has one of the highest homeless and transient population rates. Lower seacoast towns have experienced a growth in substance abuse and its tragic consequences among youth. An initial meeting of service providers in the fall of 2002 emphasized the need to establish youth development activities in the lower seacoast area. In facilitating this initial meeting, I learned there were few activities for youth during out-of-school time and no targeted outreach programs for youth in greatest need. Since then, interested parties have continued to meet on a monthly basis at SYS, expanding and formalizing

their involvements on behalf of local youth and families. The Lower Seacoast Youth and Family Coalition (LSYFC) has a signed memorandum of agreement among organizations and individuals, with a formal mission and vision to guide our efforts.

UNHCE has played an instrumental role in the specific youth program developments, as well as the formal coalition building and partnerships that are central to sustaining quality youth programming. Multi-year funding was initially secured through the federal Child, Youth and Families At-Risk (CYFAR) project in 2003. This grant supported a UNHCE-SYS partnership to implement a two-day/week afterschool leadership program for at-risk middle school age. Today, with additional funding streams, the project has grown to provide afterschool activities five-days/week during the school year, and an eight week summer enrichment program. Programs have been extremely successful with a focus on activities of interest and beneficial to youth (e.g., leadership, adventure, media, technology, cooking, fitness and civic engagement activities), as well as family outreach and involvement activities. The renovation of the old 1845 Dearborn Academy facility has also been especially important in creating a base for youth development activities in Seabrook. Having been used as a storage facility for a local church since the 1960s, a few small grants and considerable volunteer energy and local business contribution has transformed the building into a fine, 5,000 square foot youth and family friendly facility with a new kitchen, bathrooms, floors, lighting and more.

The project has greatly expanded through continued university and community collaboration. Ten UNHCE program staff have assisted with this project in some capacity, and a total of five UNH Family Studies' interns (one of whom now works as the afterschool program coordinator at SYS) have experienced a positive year long placement and made a major contribution to the project. Today Seacoast Youth Services provides afterschool programming for youth 5 days/week, as well as a full 8 week summer activities program for youth. Monthly family nights involve youth preparing a meal and social time for family members, and community service involvements, such as a monthly beach clean-up, continue. SYS has established a positive reputation for serving a diversity of youth, including many with emotional and behavioral challenges, in a positive environment with engaging activities.

Now in the final year of the 5 year CYFAR grant, project sustainability is a focus of current efforts. The genesis of this project has been aptly described as *'building a merry-go-round while we are on it,'* since we simultaneously worked to build a physical, programmatic, funding and community advisory base while responding to the pressing needs of youth for a positive place to go and engaging things to do. Along this journey, we adopted a *'whatever it takes'* (SYS's official motto) approach, willing to transport youth, meet with families in their homes, mobilizing all sorts of local resources, and not ever excluding a youth in need. Community youth development has been appropriately defined by some as the merger of 'community organizing' and 'youth development' programming which has been very much the case in this project. My project involvement is now focused on sustainability and further documenting and sharing this experience.

## 4. PROJECT DETAILS

### Goals and Objectives

- Establish and sustain positive youth development programming that engages a diversity of youth who may benefit from participation at SYS.
- Expand organizations & individuals and their involvement in the LSYFC as advisory and assisting partners to improve and sustain the project at SYS.
- Document and share the SYS-UNH partnership project with a wider public, professional and academic audience through publications, conference presentations and media exposure.

### Target Population/Audience

Youth and families from lower seacoast area towns, with particular targeted outreach to involve youth experiencing personal, social or financial challenges, as well as the community-at-large to invest in supporting this effort.

### Methods

- Implementation of best practice youth development programming with appropriate process and outcome evaluation methods.
- Fostering positive youth development through Belonging, Mastery, Independence & Generosity (as articulated in the Circle of Courage work of L. Brendtro, et. al., *Reclaiming Youth At-Risk*, 1990)
- Securing of local and federal grant sources (i.e., CYFAR (5 years), United Way (3 years) JCPenney/4H National Council (3 years), other foundations/corporations).
- Documentation of the process and outcomes of the project through sharing both formal evaluation data and the powerful voice and experience of youth, families and program staff involved in project.

### Evidence of External Collaboration and Partnership:

Formal partnership with between SYS and UNHCE has included contract agreements since 2003, and a 4-H Partnership Plan since 2006. Direct project staffing has been transitioned from primarily UNHCE staff to SYS employees, with UNHCE providing more of a technical assistance and consultation role. The mutual beneficial nature of this partnership was recently highlighted at a UNHCE sponsored 'County Conversation' event held at the SYS facility in June, 2008. In addition to tours and hands-on activities with youth, a panel highlighted the mutual benefits of the UNH-SYS and parents spoke about their positive experience with the services provided. Some 80 people were in attendance, including the UNH President, department chairs, commissioners, legislators, community business leaders and local residents. Mutual benefits have included the establishment of greatly needed quality youth services, grants/funding for SYS and UNH, community placements for UNH interns, national exposure for the project and an opportunity for sharing outcomes and lessons learned with academic, professional and public audiences.

### Expected Impact:

The establishment of sustainable quality programs at SYS, with funding, staffing, and continual evaluation/quality improvement strategies has been the primary expected impact. Program evaluation incorporates surveys and focus groups to assess both the

particular impact of specific programs on youth, as well as the broader impressions of the projects impact on youth families and the community-at-large. Opportunities for ethnographic and longitudinal research are present here as well and pursuit of such is being considered.

**Scholarly Connection:**

This project has and will continue to provide a dynamic vehicle for community youth development work that is the charge of my position with UNHCE. My professional development has been greatly enhanced through multi-level work at direct programming and community organizing levels. I have had the opportunity to co-present workshops based upon my experience with this project at two national CYFAR conferences and have contributed to local and national reporting and publicity regarding the project and its outcomes. The UNHCE home webpage highlighted the project in July, 2008 and the an article covering the NH CYFAR project will soon be published on the Children Youth and Family Education and Research Network website ([www.cyfernet.net](http://www.cyfernet.net)). I look forward to further documenting and submitting this project for recognition and publication as a national 4-H Program of Distinction by the close of this year, and also plan to pursue academic/professional publication of the program and collaboration outcomes experienced. Such publication may serve as a guide to community youth development work and further action research in the field.

**5. EVALUATION PLAN**

The initial grant funded leadership project with SYS has undergone a process and outcome evaluation conducted as part of the CYFAR grant initiative through an independent evaluator (i.e., Scott Meyer, Ph.D., Plymouth State University). The evaluation has entailed pre-post testing of leadership program participants; focus groups with youth participants, parent/guardians, and collaborating partners; and annual surveys with parent/guardians and collaborating partners. This evaluation data has been posted annually at the national CYFAR site along with other reporting data (see <http://72.29.23.34/public/communityreport.aspx?pid=1426>). A final project evaluation will be completed after the grant ends in April 2009.

As part of my outreach scholarship project, I am working to expand the evaluation capacity of the SYS youth development center effort from an action research perspective. This involves further documenting and sharing the program development, interagency partnerships and coalition building that has resulted from the initial grant funded project. The telling and sharing of this story holds potential for not only supporting and sustaining this project, but may serve to guide other community youth program development journeys, especially during times of increasing youth needs and decreasing funding opportunities.