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Northern Berkshire Community Coalition

Coalition news

An update from



October 2025, Volume XL, Number 4

Entering a Brave Space: Highlights from the 40th Needs Assessment Forum



▲ A group of about forty community members gathered in the conference room of Hotel Downstreet to share their thoughts for upcoming forums

The Northern Berkshire Community Coalition's 40th Needs Assessment Forum on September 12th opened with an invitation to enter a brave space. Executive Director Amber Besaw explained that the phrase, adopted from our local youth, captures a deeper truth: while we can try to make spaces safe, we can't guarantee that safety. A brave space, however, asks participants to come with courage, openness, and honesty—an idea that set the tone for the day.

The forum drew a wonderful turnout of neighbors, business owners, and community leaders who began by sharing what they love most about life in the northern Berkshires. Autumn's dazzling foliage, the natural beauty of the mountains, and the ease of walking from one friendly spot to another all made the

list. Keith Bona, owner of Berkshire Antique Emporium, highlighted the people themselves, saying he feels fortunate to meet locals, college students, and tourists every day. Annie Cook celebrated the region's efforts to close the socioeconomic gap, pointing to programs like Free Day at MASS MoCA as an example of that commitment. And Lisa Blackmer reminded everyone that this has long been a community that bands together whenever help is needed.

After celebrating those strengths, the group moved into the forum's traditional "Good Stuff vs. Challenges" conversation, which this year included a lively new twist: "I Heard That...". This addition invited participants to share news, rumors, and clarifications that affect community life.

One participant shared that they "heard" the rail trail will be extended to North Adams, a development that promises even more opportunities for recreation and connection. Another important clarification dispelled a common misunderstanding about the Berkshire Food Project lunches: they are not just for those in need. Everyone is welcome to stop in, enjoy a delicious meal, and share good company with fellow community members.

The rest of the discussion covered both progress and persistent concerns. Participants celebrated programs such as The Hub, a weekly meeting hosted by nbCC and NAPD that has already helped more than 200 people at immediate risk. They pointed to creative initiatives like GreylockCreative.org and celebrated the wealth of free fun woven into local life—everything from concerts and community festivals to scenic hikes and engaging library programs—all supported by the invaluable service of free bus transportation and bike lanes. At the same time, they acknowledged ongoing challenges, including limited access to mental and primary health care, the need for more drivers to keep those free buses running, and the continuing struggle to support neighbors dealing with addiction and housing insecurity.

As always, the ideas and stories shared at the forum will guide nbCC's work in the coming year. From the first brave words to the last hopeful conversation, the 40th Needs Assessment Forum showed once again how the northern Berkshires listens, learns, and moves forward—together.

~Sara Keagle, Office Coordinator

(See page 4 for this year's topic choices and instructions on how to submit your vote.)



Our Mission

"Empowering the Northern Berkshire region to enhance the quality of life through our efforts at connecting, convening, and supporting all facets of the community."

In pursuit of this mission, we place particular emphasis on the following:

- Strengthening neighborhoods and community life
- Preventing alcohol/substance abuse and supporting recovery
- Promoting health and wellness
- Helping families to be strong and resilient
- Supporting positive youth development
- Building bridges between residents and service agencies

Coalition Supporters

Public Sources

- MA Dept. of Children & Families/EOHHS
- MA Cultural Council
- MA Department of Public Health
- MA Department of Public Health, Bureau of Substance Addiction Services

Local Support

- Contributions from our many individual supporters

The Coalition is a member agency of the Northern Berkshire United Way and the Williamstown Community Chest.



To submit announcements to the Coalition E-zine:

The **Coalition E-zine** is a weekly e-blast, published every Thursday, with news and announcements from Northern Berkshire agencies and organizations. Submissions must be received by 9:00 am Tuesday morning to be considered for inclusion in that week's issue. All submissions are subject to editing and should be 50 words or less. All events related to Northern Berkshire community public health will be considered for publication. Banner ads are available. For more information, please call 413-663-7588, or to submit an announcement, please email phzine@nbccoalition.org.



As nbCC celebrates our 40th year serving the northern Berkshire community, we thought it would be fun to share excerpts from the archives. The following are pages from Volume 1 Number 3: January 1987, the first paper newsletter we have in our archive.

COALITION NEWS is the newsletter of the Northern Berkshire Health and Human Services Coalition. Its function is to keep the membership informed. It's a service to the COALITION membership. Announcements that you may have will reach all COALITION members (over 175 at present) if submitted to Al Bashevkin c/o North Adams State College to be included in this newsletter.

!!!!!!!What's Happening!!!!!!!

- December's Events

The December Coalition meeting was held at the Fireside Lounge at North Adams State College because of previous scheduling for the Legion Hall. Despite the temporary change of venue, the meeting was well attended and lots was accomplished. Concern for funding cuts that would close the Northern Berkshire Emergency Worker's Assistance Center (WAC) in January prompted a letter from the Coalition to the State secretaries of labor and economic affairs. A discussion followed on how to best advocate for continuation of the WAC.(more on the WAC elsewhere in newsletter) Feedback from the Coalition membership led to the formation of a new task force (day care) and to a discussion about our roots. (what are we doing for the unemployed?) January Coalition meeting will discuss concerns for the unemployed. February meeting plans are to invite our area legislators for a legislator's forum. March hopes to have a discussion with Economic Development people for the Northern Berkshire area. Task force summaries follow:

HOUSING :

The Right to Housing Project, state sponsored by the Massachusetts Coalition for the Homeless, and locally endorsed by the Coalition fell short of its goal of 60000 signatures (48000 received) and so we will not see a referendum on the ballot addressing everyone's right to housing. The Housing Task Force meeting was snowed / slushed out in December. Next meeting is rescheduled for Wednesday January 7 at 1:00 at North Adams City Hall. Spokesperson: **Therese Louison**

NEWS AND VIEWS

****Get your nominations in for the Coalition Peer Recognition Citations to be awarded at the Coalition Social. RULES :** Employees of Coalition agencies are eligible, Nominees must not be members of management, Nominees must not work for the nominating agency, Send nominations c/o Thorman Hulse, NBEWAC, 45 Eagle St, North Adams, Ma 01247. Nominations due Jan 9. This is our chance to give recognition to the deserving.

**** Help us to have a most productive meeting in January. We would like to invite unemployed and underemployed residents of Northern Berkshire to talk with us about what's happening from their perspective. If you know someone who has something to say here, invite them or drag them to the January meeting.**

**** The social security office now offers both telephone service and appointments in addition to its usual walk-in service. Human service workers who want to serve as advocates for their clients may wish to make an appointment thereby avoiding unnecessary reception area waiting times. Call 663-5327 for an appointment.**

****Uh, oh..... The State Department of Mental Health is planning to reorganize. These plans include consolidation and elimination of area offices. Our area office for Berkshire County is in Pittsfield. Elimination of this office would put even greater distances between North County needs and State policymakers in Boston. Letters are requested to push for continuation of local administrative control and the local advisory board (mental health and mental retardation) located in Berkshire County. These letters can be addressed to Marc Lally, President, DMH State Advisory Committee, 160 North Washington St., Boston, Ma 02114.**

**** Listen to the Opinion show on WMNB on Friday, Jan 9 for Michael Murphy, EdD, and Sue Dence, MA, of Northern Berkshire Mental Health Association to talk on mental health needs.**

****jobs, jobs, ...Northern Berkshire Mental Health Association, Family Treatment Project is looking for a clinical aide. The six hour / week position would include assisting clinical staff in a parent-child group and a young children's group. More info, Anthony Siracusa, PhD, program director at 664-4541. Typist, experienced in dictation, 10 hours / week. Fran, 664-4541.**

**** Northern Berkshire Emergency Worker's Assistance Center is sponsoring a course in bookkeeping 3 nights / week for 5 weeks. Total 45 hours. Course is entitled Basic Bookkeeping, is free, and will be located at North Adams State College. Register at the WAC at 45 Eagle St., North Adams.**

Northern Berkshire Community Coalition Board of Directors Fiscal Year 2026

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We need your VOTE! 2025/26 Forum Topics

Thank you to everyone who attended the annual community needs assessment forum. It's time to VOTE for the topics you care the most about having conversations about at this year's forums. Below you will find a short survey asking you to prioritize your top 5 topics or issues that were brought to nbCC by the community on September 12th. We will use your responses to determine the focus of our community forums over the next 10 months.

Please rank your top 5 priority topics & ideas from the list below. Please only choose 5 of the 14 to rank. Thank you so much for your participation, your voice matters!

- Housing & Homelessness
- Substance Use, Treatment, & Recovery
- Food Security
- Transportation
- Volunteerism: Opportunities, Recruitment, & Maintenance
- Elevating Youth Voice & Engagement
- Accessing News & Information: Challenges & Assets
- Healthcare Services: Challenges & Preventative Care
- Convening Community: Opportunities & Challenges
- Bike Culture in North Berkshires: Building a Safe Community for Bikes & Vehicles
- "I heard that... my taxes should be going to good roads and infrastructure but they are paying for recreation centers and skateparks instead."
- "I heard that... businesses in North Adams have a low cost to start up and it's easy."
- "I heard that... immigrants in our community are scared."
- "I heard that... there will be huge cuts to SNAP, Medicaid, fuel assistance and other support programs after the mid-term elections."

SUBMIT your votes by calling us at 413-663-7588, emailing us at info@nbccoalition.org or using this link online: <https://bit.ly/2025-26-forums>

Community Outreach Volunteer Program Begins Oct. 6th

The Community Outreach Volunteer Program (COV) is back already and it looks a little different this time. Based on participant feedback, the program has been streamlined to just 10 weeks of Monday evening classes. This schedule is much shorter than the previous six month commitment. The 10 week program will be supplemented with a series of panel discussions that will take place monthly from October through June. These panel discussions will be open to the public and take place on the last Thursday of the month, from 6-8 p.m. at the UNO Community Center. The first panel discussion will take place on Thursday, October 30th, and will be comprised of experts from local food access organizations.

To register for this program or learn more: gglasier@nbccoalition.org or 413-663-7588

Meet Our Newest Member of the Team!

Youth Support Worker - Merudjina Normil



1) In a few sentences, tell the community a little bit about yourself.

I was born in Haiti, and immigrated over to the U.S. when I was a year and a half old. I moved to the Berkshires at the age of seven. I'm an alum of Pittsfield High School and Williams College. I am an interdisciplinary artist and scholar who loves to spend time with my loved ones, especially my cat, Sol.

2) What is your favorite thing about living in the Berkshires?

My favorite thing about living in the Berkshires is the view and the community. I love exploring the natural scenery and experiencing the varying cultures in each region.

3) What are you most interested in about the work the Coalition does?

I am most interested in supporting the Northern Berkshire community through my work at the Coalition. I am really excited to create a safe and fun environment for the youth in this year's programming.

YOUTH PROGRAMMING RETURNS IN OCT. REGISTER TODAY!

➤ We offer four different programs for *teens*, including one specifically for 6th - 8th graders.

FREE. Snacks & transportation provided.

**QUESTIONS? 413.663.7588 OR
CSACHERSKI@NBCCOALITION.ORG**



Who Will You Celebrate with a Neighborly Recognition Award?

Is there anyone you would like to thank this year for going above and beyond in the community?

The Northern Berkshire Community Coalition has been collecting submissions throughout the year to recognize community members who have volunteered or supported their community in some way. Please consider recognizing an individual in one of the following categories:

Businesses & Groups Pulling Together- These groups have helped a neighborhood or the wider community by working together for the benefit of others.

Youth Taking the Lead- Young people are making positive change in their neighborhood or community.

Family Support- These individuals have advocated and/or supported family units in a variety of ways.

Community Health and Wellness- These individuals have contributed to making their community a healthier place to live.

Neighborly Acts - These individuals go above and beyond for their neighborhood or community, helping others in many different ways.

Everyone who is submitted will be recognized at the Celebration on **Wednesday, November 19, 2025.**



Here is a link to the nomination form, along with a physical copy which can be filled out and mailed or brought to our office at 61 Main Street, Suite 218, North Adams, MA 01247.

Fill out a Neighborly here:
https://bit.ly/the_nbcc_neighborlies

THE NEIGHBORLIES

Community Recognition Form

Person/Group/Business you are recognizing (You must provide at least one form of contact for the awardee.):

NAME: _____

PHONE OR EMAIL: _____

Check the category:

☐ Community Health and Wellness

☐ Businesses & Groups Pulling Together

☐ Youth Taking the Lead

☐ Family Support

☐ Neighborly Acts

I recognize this person/group/business for: (15 words or less, please!)

YOUR information (You must provide at least one form of contact!):

NAME: _____

PHONE OR EMAIL: _____

ADDRESS: _____

Send or deliver completed form by November 7th to:

NEIGHBORLIES C/O NBCC
61 Main Street, Suite 218,
North Adams, MA 01247

nbCC

Northern Berkshire Community Coalition
Community Empowerment • Prevention & Wellness

All those recognized will receive an award!

Recognition forms received after November 7th will be awarded in the coming year.

We're Hiring! Open Positions at nbCC

Apply via mail to Amber Besaw at 61 Main Street, Suite 218, North Adams, MA 01247 or email jobs@nbccoalition.org. Please include a cover letter, resume, and contact information for 3 references. For more details about our open positions please visit our website at bit.ly/WorkAtNBCC for more information about these positions.

Family Resource Center Clinician: Rate: \$29-30/hr, PLUS a \$5,000 sign-on bonus after completion of 1 year

The Family Resource Center (FRC) Clinician will provide Comprehensive Mental Health Assessments, including the Family Strengths and Needs Assessment (FSNA) assessment; short term treatment; and Care Planning to Youth and Families of the FRC.

Family Support Worker: Salary: \$40-43k/annually

The Family Support Worker is responsible for providing support to families who have engaged with nbCC. They will provide services at The Family Resource Center site, in schools, in the community, and in the homes of families, when applicable.

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Northern Berkshire Community Coalition, 61 Main Street Suite 218, North Adams MA 01247 • (413) 663-7588 • www.nbccoalition.org

Coalition Events

Community Outreach Volunteer(COV) Training

Mondays, Oct. 6 - Dec. 8, 5:30 - 8PM, UNO Center, 157 River Street, North Adams

nbCC is seeking community-minded individuals who want to help their neighbors and be more engaged in their community. This training is for residents interested in exploring or expanding their community leadership by learning more about the available services and assets of the communities we live in, and how they can be a resource to others. Participants will learn about: Volunteering opportunities
Civic Engagement
Leadership Development
REGISTRATION REQUIRED. To register: 413-663-7588 or ggiasier@nbcccoalition.org

Cooperative Parenting

Tuesdays, Oct. 7 - Nov. 18, 5:30 - 7:30PM, 61 Main Street, Suite 218, North Adams

FREE PARENTING SERIES -The overall emphasis of Cooperative Parenting is to offer children the opportunity to grow in a home environment free from being caught in the middle of their parents' hostility.

The goals of this program are to:

- Assist parents in shifting their role from former spouses to co-parents
 - Educate parents regarding the impact of parental conflict on their child's development
 - Help parents identify their contribution to conflict while increasing impulse control
 - Teach parents anger management, communication and conflict-resolution skills
 - Educate parents about children's issues in divorce.
- Transportation & child care are available with at least 24 hours notice. REGISTRATION REQUIRED. REGISTER OR MORE INFO: 413-663-7588 OR NKENNEDY@NBCCOALITION.ORG

Parenting Journey

Wednesdays, Oct. 8 - Dec. 17, 5:30 - 7:30PM, 61 Main Street, Suite 218, North Adams

FREE PARENTING SERIES -This is a 10-week program. Its mission is to create safer, more resilient families by supporting them in developing their inner strengths, life skills, and network of resources they need to succeed.

Parents who have found value in the program are parents who struggle to manage personal and professional obligations, come from diverse social, cultural, and economic backgrounds, have experienced violence or childhood trauma, in recovery, experience mental health issues, or are working to regain custody of their children. Transportation & child care are available with at least 24 hours notice. REGISTRATION REQUIRED. REGISTER OR MORE INFO: 413-663-7588 OR NKENNEDY@NBCCOALITION.ORG

nbCC Monthly Forum: Project Updates

Friday, Oct. 10, 10:00AM-12:00PM, at Hotel Downstreet, 40 Main Street

All are welcome! Join us for our forum and learn about the latest developments in ongoing projects including the bike trail, route 2 overpass status, Please join us! The presentation will be preceded with a round of introductions, and opportunity for everyone to share announcements. For questions or more information give us a call at 413-663-7588.

Learn Through Play: Leaves are Falling

Saturday, Oct. 11, 10:00 - 11:00 AM, UNO Center, 157 River Street, North Adams

In collaboration with Child Care of the Berkshires. Activities and circle time with sensory activities. Best for ages 0-5 years. No registration required. Contact us at 413-663-7588 or nkennedy@nbcccoalition.org

nbCC Annual Downtown Trick-or-Treat

Friday, Oct. 24, 4:30 - 6PM, Downtown, North Adams

It's time for the annual downtown Trick-or-Treat in North Adams! This year a portion of Main Street will be closed off to traffic and we're hoping even more businesses can join us downtown in the fun holiday celebration! To register your business to participate please contact us at 413-663-7588 or ggiasier@nbcccoalition.org

nbCC Hosts Coffee in the Courtyard

Thursday, Oct. 30, 7:30 - 9AM, Park St. Courtyard, Adams

Please join us for a hot coffee and a tasty breakfast treat as we continue our third season of early morning community networking events. Free of charge and open to the public, Coffee in the Court takes place in Armory Court on Park Street in downtown Adams. This is a great forum to celebrate all of the good things that are happening in Adams while enjoying a bite to eat and sipping on a hot coffee or tea.

nbCC Youth Empowerment Program

Mondays, 5:00-6:30 PM, 61 Main Street, #218, North Adams

STARTING OCT. 20: Free and open to youth, 6-8th grade, who live in or attend school in North Berkshire. A weekly group to talk about school, emotions, navigating teen years, making friends and more. Snacks provided; transportation available. Register: call 413-663-7588

Youth Leadership Program

Tuesdays, 5:00 - 7:00PM, 61 Main Street, Rm. 213, North Adams

STARTING OCT. 21: Free and open to youth ages 14-19 who live in or attend school in North Berkshire. Young people are changing the world and you can too. Make a positive change in yourself and the world around you. Develop leadership skills, discuss what drives you, meet other young leaders and plan projects in your community. Snacks provided; transportation available. Register: call 413-663-7588

nbCC Bike Collective Hours - LAST MONTH BEFORE CLOSING FOR THE WINTER

*Tuesdays, 3:30-5:30 PM, The Armory, 206 Ashland St., North Adams

1st Tuesdays - OPEN HOURS

2nd & 3rd Tuesdays BY APPT.

Bring your own bike or work on a bike at the bike collective. You'll have the opportunity to learn from other community members on basic bike fixes, or team up with more experienced bike mechanics to rebuild a bike. Tools and stands are provided. All NB residents are welcome! For more info, call us at 413-663-7588.

FRC Parenting Together Group * NEW TIMES

2nd & 4th Wednesdays, 10AM - 12PM, UNO Community Center, 157 River Street, North Adams

A peer-driven/peer-supported group in a judgement-free, confidential space. Snacks provided. Children welcome.

Teen Writing Workshop

Wednesdays, 5:00 - 7:00 PM, held at nbCC, 61 Main St., Suite 218, North Adams

STARTING OCT. 22: Free and open to youth ages 13-19 who live in or attend school in North Berkshire. Aspiring writers and poets! Join this incredibly supportive group and get 1-on-1 help with your writing and performance style. Opportunities to perform and be published. Snacks and supplies provided; transportation available. Register: 413-663-7588

Youth Health Collaborative

Thursdays, 5:00pm - 7:00pm, 61 Main Street, Rm. 213, North Adams.

STARTING OCT. 23: (14-19 Yrs. Old) This program is intended to engage young people in supporting the health of their peers in the region. The aim of this program is to benefit the community by directly engaging young people in the act of bettering their environments. This is the only program with a limit on attendance, as there are only ten spots available! Participants will receive a stipend for completing this program. **Please call or email to apply:** 413-663-7588 or info@nbcccoalition.org

*NEW LOCATIONS: Grandparents Raising Grandchildren Coffee Time

1st Friday, 10:00 AM - 12:00 PM. Adams COA, 3 Hoosac St., Adams

3rd Friday, 10:00 AM - 12:00 PM. North Adams COA/ Spitzer Center, 116 Ashland St., North Adams

This is a group for grandparents who are actively parenting their grandchildren giving them a safe and confidential space to share similar experiences with other grandparents. Coffee and snacks provided.

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nbCC is
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Northern Berkshire Community Coalition
61 Main Street, Suite 218, North Adams, MA 01247

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