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Northern Berkshire Community Coalition

Coalition news

An update from



February 2026, Volume XL, Number 8

Northern Berkshire Gathers to Celebrate the 32nd Annual MLK Day

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. said, “The time is always right to do what is right.” This year’s MLK Day of Service was no exception, as over 150 community members of all ages dedicated their afternoon to serving their community in honor of the late Dr. King.

The MLK Day Committee switched the schedule up this year in hopes of drawing more new faces to the event. Previous years’ events began early in the morning to organize into groups and head to the various volunteer opportunities throughout the northern towns, and ended with a celebratory luncheon. This year, the event began later, starting at 11:00 a.m. with the Peacemaker Award presentation and lunch, before sending everyone on their way to end the day at various service sites.

The room was greeted by MCLA President Jamie Birge and followed by Senator Paul Mark. Each reflected on the importance of the work of Dr.

King and our responsibility to our community and fellow humans.

The 2026 Peacemaker Award recipient, Wendy Penner, elaborated on the previous sentiments, saying, “The legacy of Dr. King’s work is in peril as I never could have imagined. This is more than a moment of political divide—there are structural issues in our society that have given rise to this moment.” Her full speech is shared on the following pages.

Everyone fueled up on a delicious lunch of chili, cornbread, chicken wings, pizza, and salad, served by volunteers from Williamstown Physical Therapy.

Finally, Representative John Barrett III addressed the room with his own reflection on the current state of the country before sending everyone out to their chosen volunteer service sites.

This year’s service sites included Louison House, Goodwill Industries, ROOTS Teen Center, Sweetwood, and



▲ 2026 Peacemaker Recipient Wendy Penner & former Coalition Ex. Director Al Bashevkin

Williamstown Commons. A group of Williams students spent the afternoon creating crafts and a community quilt with residents at Sweetwood, while a group of BART Charter School students spent the afternoon cleaning and organizing the ROOTS Teen Center. Attendees on site created blankets and mittens as well as Valentines and friendship bracelets.

Please consider joining us next year on Monday, January 18, 2027.



▲ From left: Senator Mark addresses the room; volunteers clear the Louison House basement; a family and other attendees create Valentines cards



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 pzhine@nbccoalition.org.

2026 Peacemaker Award Recipient

This year the MLK Jr. Day of Service Committee is proud to announce Wendy Penner as the selected recipient of this honor. The award will be presented at the annual Northern Berkshire MLK Jr. Day of Service, on Monday, January 19th during the celebratory luncheon.



▲ 2026 Peacemaker Recipient Wendy Penner

Wendy is a volunteer community organizer and has previously worked in the non-profit world on issues

related to the environment and substance use. Wendy is deeply committed to the northern Berkshire Community and to the idea of “think globally, act locally.” She has helped lead initiatives for the citizen-led Williamstown COOL Committee for many years, which empowers people to address climate change through local action. She is a champion for public health approaches to support people impacted by substance use, a member of Have Hope Recovery Center, and the northern Berkshire HEAL coalition. Wendy is on the leadership team of the North Berkshire Indivisible chapter, Greylock Together, and she is currently co-president of Congregation Beth Israel.

2026 PEACEMAKER SPEECH

Thank you – I am so honored to be recognized today. Thank you to nbCC for serving as the backbone of this event, and to the volunteer committee of organizers who have allowed it to take place for 33 years.

I am humbled to be recognized by an award named for the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King on this day of service. This event is, at heart, a celebration of our national and local striving to live up to the ideals of Dr. King. and his committed work for racial equality, economic justice, and nonviolence and antimilitarism.

There is so much I want to say about this community I love—about how we show up for each other, how we demonstrate community care for those who are struggling, how we support and celebrate the environment we love, and how we understand how important it is that every community member deserves to feel valued, seen, and uplifted.

But since I have this platform for only a few minutes, I need to name some hard truths about this moment and then speak about how I hope we are rising to meet it together. At the federal level, our democratic norms and institutions are being eroded and dismantled in plain sight, voting rights are under assault, the truth is routinely distorted and perverted, and the dignity of immigrants, working families, black communities, and marginalized people is being treated as expendable.

The legacy of Dr. King's work is in peril as I never could have imagined. This is more than a moment of political divide—there are structural issues in our society that have given rise to this moment. According to data from the US Federal Reserve, the bottom 50% of people in the United States have 2.5% of the country's

assets and wealth. Relatedly, over 14 billion was spent on federal elections over these last two election cycles.

Dr MLK cautioned us, “The time is always right to do what is right.” He speaks from decades past to this present moment. A time when we all need to shine and be our best, a time of spiritual crisis for so many when sitting it out in the “safe” state of MA is not an option. We stand at a pivotal moment, one that requires all hands on deck.

What can we do?

- Let’s use all the tools we each have to find courage and community—I look around this room and feel an abundance of hope; I see so many helpers. I will just call out a few:
- We are feeding each other as we always have but even more so—because the need is greater and because we now have community members who are afraid to leave their homes. Thank you thank you to our network of food security providers.
- I know people who have run for office—one who is now a town meeting delegate in Adams.
- I see someone who has made literally thousands of buttons to help change the visual landscape of this moment (I’m wearing one of them – Immigrants make America Great).
- Community members who have founded organizations and organized weekly standouts.
- We have had hundreds if not thousands of Berkshire County residents attend Know Your Rights trainings—not because they want to protect themselves—but because they want to use their privilege to protect vulnerable community members.
- I have seen thousands of people rising up to peacefully protest, asking “What can I do?” and using their voices and their bodies to be both visible and vocal.
- As an organizer for Greylock Together we have seen people attend monthly meetings, join Action Teams, write postcards & letters, call our representatives, canvass, perform pop-up theatre, create art, facilitate outreach to legislators and businesses—and so much more.
- We have raised money to help immigrants receive critical legal representation and driver’s licenses, and we have set up mutual aid networks.

There is so much more I want to say but I want to close by saying together, we can meet this moment and do great things. I want to end with two quotes:

Dr King quote: “Returning Hate for Hate multiplies hate, adding further darkness to a night already devoid of stars. Darkness cannot drive out darkness only light can do that.”

And finally, I’d like to close with a quote from the poet June Jordan’s “Poem for South African Women”-

“We are the people we have been waiting for.”

THANK YOU!

Northern Berkshire Community Coalition Board of Directors Fiscal Year 2026

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In celebration of our 40th year, here's what the Coalition was up to 20 years ago!



BLAST FROM THE PAST...



February 2006

NEWS

"The mission of NBN is to connect and support residents within neighborhoods to build community, create stronger neighborhoods, and make linkages to groups, institutions and other resources."

Foster Family Connections Gets Crafty

January 5 saw another enjoyable meeting of the Foster Family Connections group. Several foster families gathered for an evening of crafts and conversation. While the children had fun creating their own artistic projects and playing games with three entertaining childcare staff, the adults relaxed and chatted with each other. The parents engaged in lively conversation on a variety of topics throughout the meeting, including issues with special meaning for foster families.

The parents also had a selection of crafts to choose from. It was delightful to see the creativity at work in the group. Several beautiful boxes and containers were ready to take home at the end of the evening.

Everyone eagerly looks forward to next month's meeting when we will have an informal speaker from Kids' Net and another selection of crafts to work with.

— Wendy Dickinson

From Shirley's Kitchen Table

UNO held its After the Holidays Party on Sunday, January 22 at the Hoosac Valley Vietnam Veterans Hall on River Street in North Adams. Twenty-five children and parents gathered to enjoy games, crafts and a movie, *The Fox and the Hounds*. Each child received a coloring book and crayons courtesy of the HVVVA Auxiliary and UNO. They also received a stuffed animal, a book — donated by Dee Peltier — and a special holiday gift. Members of the UNO Committee who were in attendance were Edna Rudnick, Betty Cahill-Corbin, Kay Clark and yours truly; and from the Vietnam Veterans, Fred Perras and Tina Holland. Games and crafts, furnished by Northern Berkshire Neighbors, were supervised by Melissa Davis.



Happy children at the UNO After the Holidays Party were grateful for the gift of books donated by Dee Peltier.

UNO's annual Spring Fling is in the planning and scheduled for Saturday, May 20 at the Eagle's Hall in North Adams. Tables are \$20.00 each and you may call me at 663-5516 if interested.

— Shirley Davis

Neighborhood Summit

People from Brayton Hill, Mohawk Forest and the Veazie Street area — a geographic neighborhood residents agreed is hard to define — attended this month's Neighborhood Summit at the Coalition office. We enjoyed a light meal and updates from the neighborhoods.

Brayton Hill is enjoying a peaceful time. Most of the neighbors know each other and get along well together. A family board game night will be held soon.

Twenty new families have moved into Mohawk Forest in the past few months. Karen Goodson, the resident service coordinator, is eager to involve new and old residents in programming. Northern Berkshire Neighbors staff members are looking forward to working with Karen to implement some of the ideas that residents expressed interest in on the recent surveys. The possible availability of the Mohawk Forest Community Room for multi-neighborhood events was discussed.

Organizing some opportunities for residents of the Veazie Street area to get to know each other was mentioned. The possibility of using a space right in the neighborhood to hold some initial meetings was brought forth.

The interest and availability of local college students to offer some activities in the neighborhoods was explored. Both MCLA and Williams College students have expressed interest in offering activities for children and adults. It was agreed that they are an underutilized resource that we are fortunate to have in our community.

— Wendy Dickinson

February 2006

United • Neighboring • Interdependent • Trusted • Youth

UNITY



NEWS

Groove Bursts Out in the New Year

After weather forced the cancellation of our December show, the Grooove burst back on the scene in January with a very successful electric show at the American Legion Post 125 in North Adams. On January 20, about 160 teens crammed into the Legion Hall to hear local bands Channel, WiddowBone, and Last in Line. The energetic event even attracted a few potential new Grooove members.



Channel performs in front of a packed house

Speaking of planning future Grooove events, the Grooove Committee is going to sharpen our arts management skills this winter and spring with some support from professionals. To kick off this series, Glenn Drohan, the editor of the *Advocate Weekly*, has kindly agreed to give a workshop to the Grooove Committee on writing press releases and working with the news media to promote events. Thank you to Glenn, and also to the American Legion, the North Adams Fire Department, Cassie Peterson, and Phee Mayer for their help with the January concert. As always, you can find out more about the Grooove and learn about upcoming shows on the teen-run Grooove website, www.myspace.com/thegrooovecafe.

-- Kate Merrigan

They Just Can't Stay Away from This Workshop

In the month of January alone, twenty-three local teens from all over northern Berkshire County participated in UNITY's ever-popular writing workshop. This count includes two workshop alums, who came back for a visit, and four first-time participants. Many thanks to workshop facilitator Robin Lehleitner, who has created an atmosphere that draws young writers back week after week, year after year.

Also of note: Workshop writer Ben Shiner participated in the annual Martin Luther King Day celebration at the First Baptist Church on January 16 by sharing an original poem he had written for the occasion. Congratulations and thank you, Ben!

-- Kate Merrigan



Luke Miller listens as Ben Shiner reads his work to 14 members of the Writers Workshop

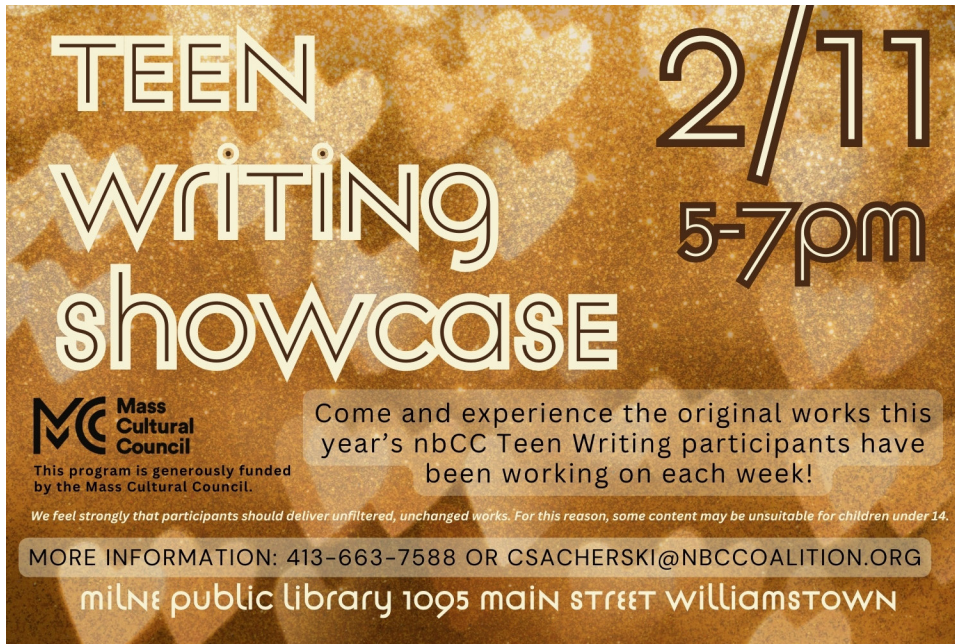
Teen Leaders Look at Values, Love, and Sexuality

Our UNITY Youth Leaders have been thinking a lot about and how these concepts relate to one another. At a recent meeting, our teens identified the values most important to them as love and freedom. Focusing on love as an essential value, we examined the messages we receive about how to give and receive love.

The Youth Leaders created a broad definition of sexuality that included not only sex but also expressions of gender and sexual identity, showing of affection, romantic relationships, reproductive health including pregnancy and infections, body image and family. They attempted to create a collage capturing this definition using images from magazines, but they quickly pointed out that the images were too limiting to portray the complexity of human sexuality. The media's images of sexuality focused only on sex, lust and sparkly presents.

Clearly our Youth Leaders are an insightful bunch, and we look forward to sharing them with the community when they begin their service projects in February.

-- Mary Parkman



**TEEN
writing
showcase**

2/11
5-7pm

Mass Cultural Council
This program is generously funded by the Mass Cultural Council.
We feel strongly that participants should deliver unfiltered, unchanged works. For this reason, some content may be unsuitable for children under 14.

Come and experience the original works this year's nbCC Teen Writing participants have been working on each week!

MORE INFORMATION: 413-663-7588 OR CSACHERSKI@NBCCOALITION.ORG
milne public library 1095 main street williamstown



**LOVE YOU
TO PIZZAS!**

FEBRUARY 7
nbCC
Northern Berkshire Community Coalition
Community Engagement, Planning & Wellness

FREE!

Join the UNO Steering Committee to celebrate community and neighbors! There will be games, crafts, pizza, and refreshments for everyone!

Saturday, February 7th from 12-2 PM
UNO COMMUNITY CENTER, 157 RIVER ST., NORTH ADAMS
MORE INFO: 413-663-7588 OR GGLASIER@NBCCOALITION.ORG

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.

NEW JOB LISTING: Development Director: Salary: \$80,000 - 90,000

The Development Director leads nbCC's fundraising and resource development efforts to ensure sustainable, diversified revenue in support of the organization's mission. As a member of the leadership team, this role advances nbCC's visibility, cultivates strong relationships with donors and partners, and integrates health equity, anti-racism, and community-driven values into all development activities.

Family Resource Center Clinician: Salary: \$65,000, PLUS a \$5,000 sign-on bonus after 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: \$45-47k/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.

Coalition Events

First Fridays North Adams: I [heart] North Adams
Friday, Feb. 6, 5:00-9:00 PM, Downtown, North Adams

Join in the First Friday Fun! Kick-off the new year with a fresh start. Visit downtown businesses for specials, sales and check out the first gallery exhibitions of 2026.

Learn Through Play: We are Special We are Kind
Saturday, Feb. 7, 10:00 - 11:00 AM, UNO Community 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, but we appreciate RSVPs. Contact us at 413-663-7588 or nkennedy@nbcccoalition.org

UNO Valentine's Day Party
Friday, Feb. 7, 12:00 - 2:00 PM, UNO Center, 157 River Street, North Adams

FREE! Join the UNO Steering Committee to celebrate Valentine's Day a bit early! There will be games, crafts, pizza and refreshments for everyone! Questions? 413-663-7588 or info@nbcccoalition.org

Teen Writing SHOWCASE
Wednesday, Feb. 11, 5:00 - 7:00 PM, at the Milne Public Library, 1095 Main Street, Williamstown

Free and open to the public. Come and hear the original works that this year's nbCC Teen Writing Workshop participants have been working on each week! *All are welcome.

RSVP Requested but not required: 413-663-7588 or csacherski@nbcccoalition.org

**We feel strongly that participants should deliver unfiltered, unchanged works. For this reason, some content may be unsuitable for children under 14.*

Monthly Forum: Volunteering
Thursday, Feb. 12, 4:00 - 6:00 PM, at the common room at Hotel Downstreet, 40 Main Street, North Adams

FREE & open to the public. All are welcome! Join us this month to talk about volunteering in your community. Opportunities, challenges, and more. The forum will begin with a round of introductions and an opportunity for announcements before the topic discussion begins. Light refreshments served. FREE & open to the public. Forum will be held in the community space at Hotel DownStreet.
More Info: 413-663-7588 or info@nbcccoalition.org

Free Family Skate Day
Thursday, Feb. 19, 11:00 AM - 1:00 PM, North Adams Veterans Ice Rink, South, 1267 Church Street, North Adams

Join the Northern Berkshire Community Coalition Family Resource Center from 11am to 1pm at the North Adams Skating Rink for 2 hours of FREE family fun! Free rentals, skating admission, light snacks and hot

chocolate. Parents must accompany children. Transportation upon request with at least 24hrs notice. No registration required, unless you need transportation. 413-663-7588 or nkennedy@nbcccoalition.org

nbCC Community Panel Discussions: Substance Use
Thursday, Feb. 26, 6:00PM-8:00PM, at UNO Community Center, 157 River Street

All are welcome! Join us for this community panel discussion. This month the topic will be substance use resources. The Substance Use Resources discussion will have representatives from numerous agencies serving our region including the Brien Center, Have Hope Recovery Center, and Berkshire Harm Reduction. The presentation will be preceded with a round of introductions, and opportunity for everyone to share announcements. Space is limited. Please register. For questions or to register for the event, give us a call at 413-663-7588 / info@nbcccoalition.org

Creating Lasting Family Connections (Started 1/26)
Starting Jan 26: Mondays, 5:00 - 7:00 PM, Hotel Downstreet, 40 Main St. North Adams

Still accepting registration. Starting on Mondays from 5:00-7:00pm on January 26, 2026. Creating Lasting Family Connections is a program designed for parents and youth, which offers training modules for both audiences.

The program is designed to improve communication and conflict resolution skills; build coping mechanisms to resist negative social influences; practice effective refusal skills for both parents and youth; engender self-knowledge and personal responsibility, and respect for others; and impart knowledge and understanding about the use of tobacco, alcohol, and other drugs. Teens ages 13-16 years old, and their parents, are encouraged to sign up, as this program involves both youth and their parents/caregivers. Registration required: 413-663-7588 or mstarr@nbcccoalition.org

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

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 commu-

nity. Snacks provided; transportation available. Register: call 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 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.

(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
supported by:



Northern Berkshire
UNITED WAY

nbCC Community Forum volunteering 2/12

HOTEL DOWNSTREET, 40 MAIN ST., N. ADAMS

4 - 6 PM



Join us this month to talk about volunteering in your community. Opportunities, challenges, and more.

The forum will begin with a round of introductions and an opportunity for announcements before the topic discussion begins. Light refreshments served. **FREE & open to the public.**

ALL ARE WELCOME!

MORE INFO: 413-663-7588 | INFO@NBCCOALITION.ORG

Do you want to STOP receiving these newsletters, or would you prefer to receive the digital version? Let us know. Give us a call at 413-663-7588 or fill out the form at the QR code.



Find this newsletter
online at www.nbccoalition.org

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



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