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Northern Berkshire Community Coalition

# Coalition news

An update from

**nbCC**

February 2025, Volume XXXIX, Number 8

## 2025 MLK Day of Service Participants Brave the Winter Weather

Despite a threatened cancellation due to a winter storm, the 2025 MLK Day of Service went ahead as planned. The weather did scare away some participants and caused a site or two to cancel for the event, but roughly 90 people gathered together in the MCLA Venable Gym to celebrate the life and work of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. by using the morning to volunteer in the community.

The weather meant a slower start to the day as volunteers trickled in after shoveling out their cars and driveways. Andre Lynch, Vice Provost for Institutional Equity and Belonging for MCLA, woke the crowd up with a passionate welcome and opening remarks, before nbCC Community Connections Coordinator, Gabby Glasier, dismissed everyone to head out to service sites.



▲ Above: Committee member Kathy Keeser offers words of praise for Dr. Gina Coleman; Participants fuel up before leaving for service sites in the morning

About two dozen volunteers stayed on site to work on projects available at the gym. Projects included making Valentines Day cards, friendship bracelets, and winter necessities like mittens and blankets.

Everyone else headed out into the community to various sites throughout north Berkshire County. Groups volunteered at No Paws Left Behind, Louison House, ROOTS Teen Center, Berkshire Food Project, Sweetwood, and weatherizing several resident's homes.

Everyone was excited to see a strong showing from our youth community at this year's day of service. A group of students from BART Charter School washed and cleaned the kennels at No Paws Left Behind, while another group visited the ROOTS Teen Center and helped organize and clean the youth drop-in space. A group of students from

Williams headed out to Sweetwood to lend a hand. High school and college students also joined the volunteers helping at the Berkshire Food Project prepping salads and chilis to serve all the hungry volunteers at the celebratory luncheon.

Service site projects wrapped up around noon and everyone headed back to the Venable Gym to enjoy the lunch provided by Berkshire Food Project, Bigg Daddy's and Christo's Famous Pizza.

(Continued on Page 2)



▲ Above: Dr. Gina Coleman with her family, husband Michael and son Diego.

► Left : Vice Provost for Institutional Equity and Belonging for MCLA, Andre Lynch wakes up the early morning gathering with a boisterous welcome.





Community Empowerment • Prevention & Wellness

## 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](mailto:phzine@nbccoalition.org).

(Continued from Cover)

MCLA President, Dr. Jamie Birge welcomed everyone back as people settled into lunch. Both he and Andre reflected on the importance of these moments of service and community, quoting reflections of both Dr. King and JFK.

Finally, members of the planning committee took the stage to present the highlight of the luncheon, the annual Peacemaker Award. This year the award was presented to Dr. Gina Coleman, long time resident of the area and the director of diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging at the Brien Center. You can read more about Gina and why she was chosen as this year's Peacemaker on page 3.

Despite the very wintery weather the day was filled with joy and laughter, and we all got some good work done, too! Please consider joining us for this event next year on Monday, January 19, 2026.

To see the full album of photos from this event please visit our Facebook page:

<https://www.facebook.com/nbcccoalition>



▲ Counterclockwise from above: Volunteers work on weatherizing several residences; Spencer Moser (center) with his son, Sawyer (left) helping clean and organize the basement storage of the Louison House; BART students clean kennels with staff at No Paws Left Behind; students and members of the Have Hope Recovery Center prep lunch at the Berkshire Food Project; Williamstown resident, Jonathan Swartz, William Shustack, Stacy Parsons Director of Community Engagement & Juvenile Diversion, Berkshire District Attorney's Office, and Dale Balawender take a moment for the camera during breakfast.

# Gina Coleman Honored with 2025 Peacemaker Award

The Peacemaker Award is given annually to an individual or group in Northern Berkshire. The award, which originated as part of the annual Martin Luther King, Jr. Day of Service, is made to persons who have contributed substantially to peace in our region. In general, the Peacemaker Award recognizes persons who have a history of working with people and/or neighborhoods and communities to provide for greater tolerance, understanding, and caring.

This year the MLK Jr. Day of Service Committee is proud to announce that Dr. Gina Coleman has been selected from the numerous worthy people and groups nominated by the community, and will be honored with the 2025 Peacemaker Award at this month's annual Northern Berkshire MLK Jr. Day of Service, on Monday, January 20th during the celebratory luncheon.

Dr. Gina Coleman is a community member whose passion for social justice and racial equity is evident in her professional and personal efforts. Currently, Gina serves as the Director of Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Belonging for the Brien Center. Through her role, she has been able to provide training to local organizations on how to confront bias and bigotry. Beyond her professional career, Gina has been an advocate on boards for several institutions: MCLA, BART, and Berkshire Music School. She leads the organization of an annual Juneteenth Celebration Concert, now in its third year, and was also an early member of the Williamstown Diversity, Inclusion, and Racial Equity Committee.

Gina has put her musical talents to work in creating a more compassionate and inclusive community as well. In 2021, Gina took part in the Black Legacy Project, a collaborative effort among local musicians to record songs with historical and cultural significance to the black community. This project was a part of the ongoing work of Music in Common, a nonprofit dedicated to bringing people of all backgrounds together and helping them find common ground through the collaboration and creation of music.

As a mother, educator, musician, and community member, Gina Coleman leads with compassion and has strived to build a more understanding, equitable, and inclusive community.



## Northern Berkshire Community Coalition Board of Directors Fiscal Year 2025

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1Berkshire

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# The History of nbCC's Youth Programming

The monthly forums of nbCC began in the usual manner in 1993 with a community needs assessment asking the questions, "What's doing in the community?" Representatives from two school districts in attendance brought up concerns about a growing level of violence and confrontation. Concern over community youth was well articulated by many educators. The discussion evolved into the question of what was different then, that might be contributing to the new experiences? While many at the forum shared concerns and problem-solving ideas, the foremost question became, "Why not ask the young people themselves? Why not offer young people the platform to recruit adults to help make their world a bit safer?"

During 1993-1994, Northern Berkshire youth were invited to most monthly forums to discuss their experiences. School superintendents, principals, teachers, agency staff and young people met each month. The adults learned a lot about the youth experience, but more importantly, both the youth and the adults learned how essential it was to meet and talk together. All involved believed that the forum for youth should continue. With support from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, the youth development arm of nbCC, called UNITY, was born.

UNITY stood for United Neighboring Interdependent Trusted Youth - coined by founding UNITY teen member Jamie Haddad. With the funds raised and the concept created, the first Program Director, Claudia Williamson, was hired. The defining purpose of the UNITY youth development project was to strengthen the Northern Berkshire voice from youth to create opportunities for youth and adults to work together for a stronger community. Two important facets of UNITY from the beginning were its roots in serving youth in the entire Northern Berkshire region and the focus on positive youth development.

In its beginning, UNITY was a venue for youth to gather locally and build toward a regional entity. Many groups in communities work with youth, but few provide opportunities for them to identify regionally. School and community sports offer competitive venues for youth; faith institutions are generally town-based, and yet issues that Northern Berkshire youth face are not confined by town lines. UNITY, from the beginning, worked to focus on positive change for the youth community. It strived to build upon community strengths and to have youth and adults working as partners. Communities do a lot for youth, but involving and empowering them to be active members of the community offered a refreshing challenge. UNITY made the adult/youth partnership a key component of its work.

During its infancy, UNITY promoted regional youth forums held in various schools. The agenda for these forums included discussions of the issues that youth face, as well as opportunities for them to get to know students from other schools. A youth-led and driven steering committee set the agendas for the wider regional/North County UNITY meetings. Being a UNITY participant held its own status as a school activity. UNITY allies (faculty or staff from local schools) supported UNITY members and provided the assistance needed for its participants to attend meetings. A year-end celebration helped UNITY reflect on the work accomplished during the year.



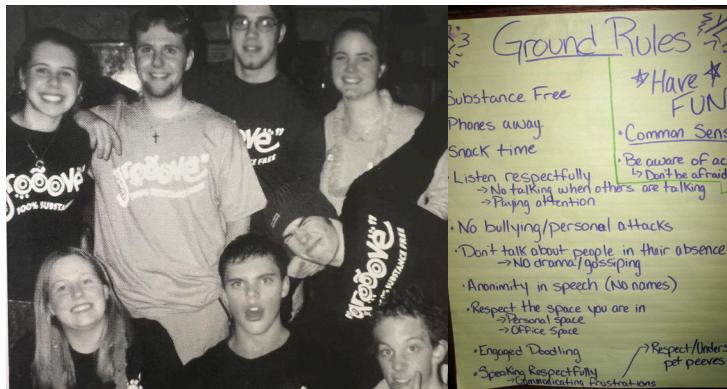
UNITY grew and took on added attributes with new members and coordinators. The UNITY Players were formed. It was a theater troupe that wrote and performed its own plays about growing up in the Northern Berkshire region. Topical subject matter for these plays came from real experiences, and while compelling with raw and emotional scripts, the performances helped push others to see and understand the youth experience differently.

UNITY ventured into the arts with assistance from a Massachusetts Cultural Council grant provided to promote arts-based activities to empower youth and encourage positive youth development. UNITY members designed a billboard and a sculpture garden at Natural Bridge State Park, published seven volumes of *Somewhere Between*, journals of teenage writing, and helped with the creation of The Grooove, a teen-led coffeehouse. The UNITY program became a mix of youth forums and arts activities.

In the early 2000s UNITY staff members implemented the Youth Leadership Program, guided by a science-based youth development curriculum with proven outcomes in preventing dropouts and teen pregnancies and reducing school failure. Participants in the UNITY Youth Leadership Program had a responsibility to perform community service. In its first full year, the young leaders provided more than 150 hours of community service!

The Grooove was born when Drury High School students Allison Buck and Breanna Robinson had a vision that became a reality on March 8, 1997. On that night, with funding from the Berkshire Prevention Alliance, a full house of teenagers gathered at the Appalachian Bean Cafe, where Ramunto's now stands, for a highly successful "open mic" night. Voila - the Grooove!

Grooove was an instant success. Teens met at the Coalition year-round to plan and mount safe, substance-free events for Northern Berkshire young people.



The sustainability of those efforts was credited to the financial support of the Youth Reach Program of the Massachusetts Cultural Council. Besides the high attendance and longevity, another Grooove strength was a history of diverse projects. Beyond the open mic nights, Grooove features "Chick Nite," rock shows at MASS MoCA, a Grooove CD and "Grooovestock" concerts that have featured workshops and speakers on issues such as peace. For a decade, Grooove explored new ways to meet the need that young people expressed for safe, fun places to hang out. Like many great things Grooove eventually came to an end due to a mix of circumstances. We hope in the future we can revisit this concept and bring a similar experience to the new generation of youth of the community.

Today, while the name UNITY has been dropped, the programs and commitment to supporting Northern Berkshire youth remains a focus of the work of the Coalition. There are currently four youth programs at nbCC. The Youth Leadership Program is still going strong. The youth led forum continues to this day, but is now the annual culmination of youth participating in the Youth Health Collaborative. Each spring this group presents one of the monthly community forums based on a topic of their choosing. *Somewhere Between* is now coming up on its 27th volume in 2025. This creative writing journal has become a staple of the Teen Writing Workshop program, a creative writing group that has expanded to include youth interested in visual arts.

The final program, the Youth Empowerment Program (YEP) is exclusively for youth in grades 6-8. This weekly group meets on Monday afternoons to talk about school, emotions, navigating teen years, making friends and more.

For more about current youth programming please reach out: 413-663-7588 or [info@nbccoalition.org](mailto:info@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](mailto: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](http://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.

## **Health & Wellness Coordinator: Salary: \$44-47k/annually, PLUS a \$1,000 sign on bonus**

The Health & Wellness Coordinator will oversee and lead the implementation of community health work to support integration of environmental, policy and systems changes to advance active living, healthy eating and sustainable systematic change in Northern Berkshire. The Health & Wellness Coordinator will also oversee the planning, implementation, and evaluation of health and wellness programming through nbCC.

## **Family Support Worker: Salary: \$38-40k/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. When you apply, please include a cover letter detailing your qualifications and why you're interested in this position, along with three references.

*Work with the community to improve people's lives.*



*Full Time. Great Benefits. Awesome Team.  
We're Hiring!*



Northern Berkshire Community Coalition  
Community Empowerment • Prevention & Wellness

For full job descriptions visit: [https://bit.ly/nbcc\\_jobs](https://bit.ly/nbcc_jobs)



Now hiring for:

- Family Support Worker
- Clinician
- Health & Wellness Coordinator

Call us: 413-663-7588 or Email cover letter & resume to [jobs@nbccoalition.org](mailto:jobs@nbccoalition.org)

## Coalition Events

### First Fridays North Adams: I <3 North Adams

Friday, Feb. 7, 5:00-9:00 PM, Downtown, North Adams

Join in the First Friday Fun! Visit downtown businesses for specials, sales and check out the new gallery exhibitions of 2025.

### Learn Through Play: We Are Special, We Are Kind

Saturday, Feb. 8, 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@nbccoalition.org

### Teen Writing SHOWCASE

Wednesday, Feb. 12, 5:00 - 7:00 PM, at the Greylock Glen Visitors Center, 135 Gould Road, Adams

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

### Monthly Forum: Community Conversation on Building Belonging

Thursday, Feb. 13, 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 for a guided conversation about building a sense of belonging in our community and region. This forum is presented in partnership with Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts. The forum will include introductions and opportunities for announcements throughout the discussion. Light refreshments served. Forum will be held in the community space at Hotel DownStreet. More Info: 413-663-7588 or info@nbccoalition.org

### UNO Valentine's Day Party

Friday, Feb. 14, 4:30-6:00 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@nbccoalition.org

### Free Family Skate Day

Thursday, Feb. 20, 1:00 - 3:00 PM, North Adams Veterans Ice Rink, South, 1267 Church Street, North Adams

Join the Northern Berkshire Community Coalition Family Resource Center from 1:00-3:00pm 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@nbccoalition.org

### Parents' Cafe: Co-parenting

Wednesday, Feb. 26, 6:00 - 8:00 PM, North Adams First Baptist Church, 131 Main Street, North Adams

For parents and caregivers who are co-parenting children. A guided conversation where peers will share their experiences and learn from each other. This is a free event where dinner and childcare will be provided for attendees.

Registration required: <https://bit.ly/Co-parenting-Cafe> 413-663-7588 or nkennedy@nbccoalition.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

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 Open Hours

**WINTER HOURS:** 1st Wednesday, 4:00-6:00 PM, The Armory, 206 Ashland St., North Adams

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.

### 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

### FRC Parenting Together Group \* NEW TIMES

2nd & 4th Wednesdays, 5:30 -7:30 PM, nbCC, 61 Main St., Suite 218, North Adams

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

### 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 bmccarthy@nbccoalition.org

### Grandparents Raising Grandchildren Coffee Time

1st & 3rd Fridays, 10:00 AM - 12:00 PM. UNO Center, 157 River Street, 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.



## Coalition Staff

### Executive Director

Amber Besaw: abesaw@nbccoalition.org

### Business & Administrative Staff

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Andrew Rosenburg: arosenburg@nbccoalition.org  
Sully Boland: sboland@nbccoalition.org

# Monthly Forum

Community Conversation on  
Race Relations in North Berkshire



THURSDAY  
**2/13**  
4-6PM

FREE & open to the public.

All are welcome!

Join us this month for a guided conversation about racism in our community and region.

The forum will begin with a round of introductions and opportunity for announcements before the presentation begins.  
Light refreshments served.

GATHERING AT HOTEL  
DOWNSTREET'S  
COMMON SPACE

**40 MAIN ST.**

nbCC is  
supported by:



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