

WRC AND HUMAN SERVICES

By Bill Schmidt

Involvement in human services planning, development and in some instances operation was an interest of the WRC from its beginning. This was evident in 1969 in the **Windham County Crime Prevention Project**, a project funded with federal money through the 1968 federal Safe Streets Act. Strong support came from Attorney General Jim Oakes, the Brattleboro and Wilmington police chiefs, the county sheriff and State Corrections Commissioner among others. The project engaged in a study of the nature and extent of crime in the region, the region's judicial administration and law enforcement agencies, and crime prevention and juvenile delinquency. It ultimately focused on the subject of police-youth relationships. A regional Crime Prevention and Control Conference was held at Windham College in May 1970.

Some of the project's outcomes were the development of "contact sessions" between youth and police in Bellows Falls, Brattleboro and Wilmington and the development of legal and drug education curriculum for high schools. In cooperation with Family and Child Guidance Services of Brattleboro, the WRC helped create the **Youth Services Commission (YSC)** and Brattleboro's **Community House** through this project which stretched into the early 1970s. YSC offices were with the WRC in its early years. Community House is a structured short-term treatment program for children 6-13 with behavioral difficulties. Both organizations exist to this day. Brownie Towle was the primary staff person in the action phase of the Crime Prevention Project.

In 1969 as well a **Human Services Committee** was formed to provide oversight to the commission's interest in human service needs and relationship with human service agencies and programs. In the mid-1970s the commission published a regional human services catalog that was updated in 1981. In addition, this committee provided administrative and/or technical assistance in the organization of the **Connecticut Valley Health Compact** and **Health Care and Rehabilitation Services of SE Vermont**, two organizations that offered hope for improved health care services in the region. Also, assistance was provided the state in reorganization of **Visiting Nurse services in SE Vermont** and technical and administrative support was given to the Windham **District Advisory Health Council**, an area health planning group formed by the Vermont Health Policy Corp. which prepared a State Health Systems Plan.

In 1973, the commission secured federal funds under the new federal Older Americans Act to establish the **Council on Aging (COA) for SE Vermont**, the first such areawide council on aging in Vermont. COA's purpose was to respond to the needs of Vermonters 60 and over in Windham and Windsor Counties by providing a range of options allowing them to choose the home and community-based services and living arrangements that suit them best. COA made it possible for older adults to "age in place" in their homes and communities, to socialize at senior centers, to receive meals-on-wheels when needing that support, and to have access to vital advocacy, legal services and other support services.

COA was a WRC program with offices at the WRC until the mid 1990s at which time it became independent and subsequently moved its offices to Springfield. In 2012 it changed its name to Senior Solutions. COA's first director was Irene Elders.

The Gathering Place, Brattleboro's adult day services for seniors, was established in 1989 with WRC's assistance. Until recently WRC continued to assist the Gathering Place with financial services and continues to provide this service for **Brattleboro Senior Meals**.

As part of a regional economic self-sufficiency program the WRC in 1974 helped organize the **Brattleboro Area Farmers Market**. Its goals were to increase local production and sales of agricultural products, provide quality and economy in food service, and support development of the local economy.

In its early years provided further organizational, site location and development assistance and a full time market manager. In 1976 the Market's board thanked the commission for its help in making the Market the most outstanding in the State according to the Vermont Agriculture Department's Development Division.

Following the closure of Windham College in 1979 the commission formed a committee to find a new use or uses for the **Windham College campus**. The commission also undertook an **evaluation of the demand at that time for postsecondary educational opportunities** and a review of existing such opportunities available to adults. One of the outcomes of this project was support for the University of Vermont to employ a continuing education coordinator for educational programs in SE Vermont.

WRC, over the years, continued with its commitment to assist with human service activities. GIS staff worked with municipalities on the mapping of the structures that aided in the establishment of **Enhanced-911 system**. In 2002 WRC staff, working with the Children First Partnership, prepared the **Windham County Child Care Needs Assessment**. The need for evening child care was one of the many needs identified in this report. Brattleboro Area Community Action soon after established an evening child care center

The **Windham Regional Mobility Study** was completed in 2012 and was a collaborative effort of Windham Regional Commission, public transit providers, school supervisory unions, youth service organizations, institutions of higher education, human service agencies, non-profits, economic development agencies, and others. This diverse group of stakeholders came together to promote the common goal of increasing mobility in the Windham Region. An outgrowth of the study is the current work to establish a new public transit route in the West River valley on Route 30.

Recently Vermont Department of Health asked WRC to participated as part of the team working on the **Opiate Addiction Solutions** and be involved with a committee working on **Healthy Communities**.