

Community Forum - November 4, 2010

Trends: Increase in local domestic violence, homelessness and substance abuse

By Beth Farley, ABUW Volunteer

The Acton-Boxborough United Way Community Forum brought together over 40 dedicated human service providers, town officials and clergy from different faiths to share with each other the pressing needs and growing trends facing our community. ABUW is dedicated to fostering communication among community leaders to strengthen the services they provide as well as identifying and creating awareness of the current needs for those who call Acton and Boxborough home.

The many agencies demonstrated new resolve in facing the challenges of the recession and the many ways it has affected families.

The most prevalent trend cited by these organizations was an increase in domestic violence and substance abuse. Domestic abuse includes spousal abuse, as well as elder abuse and dating violence. Another critical issue related to the domestic abuse crisis is a similar increase in homelessness.

Economic and financial factors are still causing much concern throughout the community as families struggle to deal with job loss, especially in a community where many children are now reaching college age. Various clergy members attested to this, recounting their discussions with parishioners who are feeling the economic strain.

Similarly, the Acton Council on Aging spoke about the new reality for many seniors as they attempt to adjust to 'living with less'.

Minuteman Services cited the challenges for caregivers of elderly with memory impairment issues, the financial toll such situations may take and the personal toll related to the inability to cope, the day to day pressure and the family pressures that may result.

The Social Worker for Acton noted the increase in families seeking help due to financial stress and how this is often manifested in the form of substance abuse and other family issues.

This roundtable is just one vehicle for identifying issues facing our community and ABUW plans another forum in the spring targeting impact areas of need as well as skill building for the non-profits themselves. Many thanks to Bagels Plus, Dunkin Donuts on Main Street and Café Ziba for providing welcome refreshments for all participants.