



Thursday, February 20, 2014

New group to help children in need

By Derek Gomes
Staff Writer

Two retired South Kingstown school principals, Marc Ladin and Michelle Little, have organized community leaders under the name Community Integrated Resources for Child and Family Learning and Engagement to meet the needs of under-served children.

The group met in South County Hospital Potter Conference Room Friday morning to review data about community health issues, and child and family demographics. Their next step will be to draft an action plan.

Ladin started the meeting by referencing the athletic feats of the Sochi Olympians. He wondered how they reached the level of the world's elite in their respective events.

"From the very beginning they were cherished, loved, supported, energized, nurtured and coached. They had a path they could [follow] to success," he said to the approximately 25 people assembled. "[We are] looking at the data for South Kingstown and trying to relate how that applies to our community and our schools. And what piece is missing for the little part of our community... [the ones who] never get the opportunity to feel like they have any potential to do anything successful."

SK CIRCLE replicates the model of the Westerly Basic Needs Network, another collaboration that brings social service providers and non-profits together to ensure residents have essentials, such as food, housing and health care.

Washington County Coalition of Children Coordina-

tor Susan Orban and Rhode Island Kids Count Principal Analyst John Neubauer presented facts about South Kingstown's children. Last April, Kids Count released its 19th annual Factbook, a document that pulls together local, state and federal data to provide a snapshot of the state's children based on 68 indicators, such as the number receiving food assistance and their median family income.

Almost 7 percent of South Kingstown's children, approximately 315, live in poverty based on the 2012 federal poverty threshold, \$18,498 for a family of three or \$23,283 for a family of four. As of October 2012, 585 of the town's children received benefits from the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, formerly known as Food Stamps. The town ranked third in Washington County in that regard, behind Westerly and North Kingstown. In 2012, 591 South Kingstown school students received free or reduced meals, according to the Kids Count Factbook.

The group also reviewed data about families that can play a major role in the security of their children. There is a lack of affordable housing, according to the HousingWorks RI 2013 factbook. Individuals are classified as "housing cost burdened" if they pay more than 30 percent of their income on rent and utilities. The average rent for a two-bedroom unit in South Kingstown is \$1,274, \$240 more than 30 percent of the average private-sector wage in town.

Cindy Wyman, South County Healthcare System assistant vice president of strategic planning and market devel-

opment, said the top four medical priorities in South Kingstown are mental health, diabetes, cancer and heart disease. This data was compiled from the Community Health Needs Assessment led by the Hospital Association of Rhode Island that surveyed 625 adults in 20 zip codes between September 2012 to May.

Of the South Kingstown respondents, 23.5 percent reported having a depression disorder, 1.5 percent higher than the incidence rate reported statewide.

While the other priorities, namely diabetes and heart disease, often afflict adults, Wyman said mental health ailments can hinder a parent or grandparent's ability to raise their children or grandchildren.

For information regarding SK CIRCLE or future meetings, email marcladin@gmail.com.