

SOCIAL SERVICES

According to the City's Consolidated Plan⁵⁵, Portsmouth is well served by a wide variety of social service organizations and networks that meet the needs of the community. The City fulfills three essential roles in the social services arena: as a direct service provider, as a funding resource⁵⁶, and as a conduit for disseminating information. In addition, the City may be in the position to enhance access to services in planning for public transportation, supplying support space for services, assisting agencies in identifying resources, etc. Planning for current and future needs addresses a variety of types of issues, from health care to violence prevention.

A number of organizations provide information and assistance to individuals seeking social services. InfoLink is a comprehensive, NH-based referral system that provides free, 24-hour access to community resources. The Community Resource Network is another referral agency, and the United Way of the Greater Seacoast is a vital source of funding and technical support to regional service providers. In addition, the end of 1999 witnessed the opening of the Community Campus on Banfield Road, an 80,000 s.f. facility that is home to several non-profit organizations who share a mission of serving Seacoast area families and children. In October of 2000, a new center for seniors that houses the Portsmouth Housing Authority Senior Center and Compass Care, providing health and related activities to seniors.

Health Care

Portsmouth is fortunate to have excellent health care services available to its residents of all incomes. Lack of awareness of free and subsidized services, however, is a fundamental obstacle to health care in the Seacoast region.⁵⁷ According to the Foundation for Seacoast Health, the top prioritized health needs of the area are:

- Access to affordable mental health services;
- Access to preventative and restorative dental services;
- Access to affordable child day and after school care;
- Access to affordable primary medical care; and
- Coordination and dissemination of health information related to identified priority needs.

Among the agencies fulfilling the need for affordable health care is the Families First Health and Support Center. Located at the Community Campus, Families First is a non-profit agency offering primary, pre-natal, and oral health care; parenting groups and classes; one-on-one family support; health education and counseling; and care coordination. In 2002, Families First served approximately 3,500 individuals.⁵⁸ Two new programs offering affordable dental care and health care for the homeless are expected to increase the number of people served by Families First; while primary and pre-natal care services have managed to keep pace with customer demand as needed, the newly established dental care program is already outstretching resources as it

⁵⁵ City of Portsmouth Consolidated Plan 2000-2005, Action Plan FY2000/2001, Portsmouth Community Development Department, May 15, 2000

⁵⁶ In 2003, grants from the General Fund and the CDBG program totaled just over \$356,000. Each year, the City's Welfare Department makes recommendations for social service funding. For a detailed list of agencies and their individual allocations, see the City's Annual Budget report.

⁵⁷ Frisbee Memorial Hospital Community Needs Assessment, June 22, 2000.

⁵⁸ Conversation with Helen Taft, Executive Director, Families First, 4/1/03.

currently has a three month waiting period for an appointment. With patient fees comprising only about 4% of its annual budget, the continued success and expansion of services is dependent upon on-going income from fundraising, foundations, government grants, insurance reimbursements, and other sources.

Other direct health care service providers include Portsmouth Regional Hospital, SeaCare Health Services, Planned Parenthood of Northern New England, and the Seacoast Mental Health Center (SMHC). Specialized support for AIDS patients is provided through AIDS Response of the Seacoast, and substance abuse services are provided through Seacoast Mental Health and the Seacoast Pavilion, located at Portsmouth Hospital. Brief descriptions of these providers follow, taken in part from the City's Consolidated Plan:

- Located at 333 Borthwick Avenue, **Portsmouth Regional Hospital** offers a full complement of health services within a facility of 144 beds. Over 200 physicians are among the hospital's staff which totals around 1,000 employees. Specialized units include Women's Care, Behavioral Health, a Heart and Lung Center, a Wound Care Center, and physical and occupational therapies. The Behavioral Health program, also known as the **Seacoast Pavilion**, has recently downsized, but continues to offer 30 in-patient beds in addition to its multifaceted outpatient services.
- **SeaCare Health Services** includes a volunteer network of over 400 physicians, dentists, nurse practitioners, podiatrists and mental health providers. Once enrolled in the program, individuals and families are able to establish a relationship with a local provider and receive preventative care, prompt attention to illnesses and referrals to specialists. Participants pay a small fee determined by their household income.
- The mission of **Planned Parenthood of Northern New England (PPNNE)** is to give people the knowledge and resources necessary to make informed, responsible reproductive choices. The major goals are to reduce unintended pregnancies; to reduce the incidence of sexually transmitted diseases and to increase people's knowledge about reproduction and sexuality. Funding is provided by CDBG, federal state and private sources. Beneficiaries are very low, low and moderate-income small and large households.
- **AIDS Response of the Seacoast** is a non-profit agency that provides direct service and support to HIV/AIDS clients. In addition, AIDS Response offers frequent anonymous testing (HIV, STDs, pregnancy, hepatitis) from its traveling van unit, as well as education regarding disease prevention. Other services include case management, referrals, legal assistance, support groups, and the like.
- **Seacoast Mental Health Center** provides psycho-therapy services including sexual offender's programming, substance abuse evaluation and treatment, and crisis intervention to individuals with mental disabilities. Funding is provided by federal, state and local agencies. Very-low- and low-income individuals who are eligible for state funded mental health services are the beneficiaries of this service.

Several organizations are dedicated to advocating for improved health care in the region. The Foundation for Seacoast Health, the Alliance for Community Health, the Women's Health Consortium, and the Portsmouth Regional Health Support Associates are among these.

The City actively supports the provision of health care to Portsmouth’s residents by providing funding to some of these agencies through the General Fund and the Community Development Block Grant program.

Dental care, substance abuse treatment, and mental health care continue to rank among the community’s highest health care needs, as demand for these services outstrips resources.

Child Care

According to the 2001 Community Needs Profile sponsored by the United Way, “There is a critical shortage of child care in the region. Much of the care that does exist puts an enormous strain on working families.” The U. S. Census reports that 17.3 percent of Portsmouth families with children under age 5 had incomes below the poverty level in 2000. This was twice the percentage for the state of New Hampshire as a whole, and nearly four times as high as the average for Rockingham County (see Table 101).

Table 101: Families Below the Poverty Level, 2000

	Portsmouth		Rockingham	State
	#	%	County %	%
All Families	4954	100.0%		
Families below poverty level	318	6.4%	3.1%	4.3%
With children under 18	282	13.3%	4.5%	6.5%
With children under 5	143	17.3%	4.8%	8.9%

Source: U.S. Census

The Community Campus has a “pro-family” mission at its core. In addition to Families First, the Community Child Care Center, Head Start, Portsmouth Early Education Program, the New Heights Teen Summit, Family Harbor, and the Seacoast Child Advocacy Center are located at the campus. Day and after-school care is available.⁵⁹ While affordability is the hallmark of these programs, the demand for child care in the Portsmouth area far exceeds the supply of service providers, and the cost of care is frequently challenging for the median family income. The annual cost for full-time care of one toddler is approximately 12.5 % of its gross income.⁶⁰ Very few opportunities for evening and weekend care exist, making it very difficult for employees in the service industries to find suitable care.

The other day care centers in Portsmouth include:

Agape Preschool	397 Lafayette Rd.
Children’s Garden School	290 Peverly Hill Rd.
Leap Into Learning Preschool	1155 Sagamore Ave.
Little Blessings Day Care	1035 Lafayette Rd.
Discovery Child Enrichment Center	30 E. Rye St.

⁵⁹ The Community Child Care Center also provides after school care at the Little Harbour, Dondero, and New Franklin Elementary Schools.

⁶⁰ Based upon \$155/week rate currently offered at Community Child Care.

In addition to child care, there are several other child-focused organizations that serve the Portsmouth community.

- **Child and Family Services of NH (CFS)** is an independent non-profit organization with offices throughout the State that serve children and family needs. Counseling, Home-Based Family Therapy, Teen Support, and Parenting Skills are among the services they provide.
- The **Community Diversion Program** is a small non-profit agency that works with at-risk youth to eliminate or prevent the need for court system involvement. Services include Alcohol, Tobacco and Drug Education, Conflict Resolution Courses, Family Mediation and Victim Offender Mediation.
- The **Court Appointed Special Advocates of New Hampshire, Inc. (CASA)** is a private non-profit organization that provides Guardian ad Litem services for children with cases of abuse and neglect.
- The **Seacoast Big Brothers/Big Sisters of NH** program establishes and monitors one to one relationships between adult volunteers and children considered at-risk due to family problems. In April 2003 the program reached a milestone of matching 200 children with mentors.
- The **Seacoast Family YMCA** offers several child care, before and after school, and recreational programs to area children.

The City supports several (all except CASA) of the above service providers via funding through the CDBG program and/or the General Fund.

In addition, the City's Recreation Program offers a wide variety of activities. Reduced fees for programming are available to any individuals or households who are unable to afford the regular fee. Six to 10 individuals and/or households are charged a reduced fee each year.

Homelessness

The City has two staff that are committee members of the Greater Seacoast Continuum of Care, a congress of homeless service providers. Several regional providers are located in Portsmouth or its immediate vicinity, thus offering relatively good access for the City's homeless population. From emergency beds to permanent housing to vocational counseling and advocacy, these services aim to assist the homeless in finding and receiving the help they need. Taken from the City's FY2000-2005 Consolidated Plan, Table 102 presents a partial inventory of agencies and the respective services they offer and plan to offer:

Table 102: Portsmouth Area Agencies Providing Homeless Services

AGENCY	SERVICES IN PLACE
Emergency/Transitional Shelter	
A Safe Place	12 beds for victims of domestic violence. Case management, support groups, legal and social advocacy, information and referrals, transportation, peer counseling, resource libraries, hotline services
Cross Roads House	40 emergency beds; 28 emergency beds for families; 18 transitional beds for individuals; 24 transitional beds for families. Case management, mental health counseling (in collaboration with SMHC), information and referral, vocational counseling, anger management classes, adult tutoring/GED preparation, in-house AAA meetings.
Permanent Housing	
The Housing Partnership	None, in Portsmouth
Permanent Supportive Housing	
Betty's Dream/ Rainbow apartments	24 units of accessible housing, service coordination, transportation, activities, and advocacy.
Seacoast Mental Health Center – Housing Department	Permanent housing in 2 locations: Three 2-bedroom condominiums serving 6 individuals, and an SRO with 5 units.
Great Bay Resident Facility	Group housing for 12 disabled individuals..
Supportive Services	
Seacoast Mental Health Center	Case management, therapy, medication, education/monitoring, MIMS, ADL assistance, 24 hour supervision, life skills training, all other services available through the Community Support program of SMHC.
Homeless Outreach Intervention Project	Outreach, transportation, food and clothing.
Rockingham Community Action (RCA) – COMPASS/ COMPASS Youth	Case management, life skills training, peer leadership/mentoring, short terms rental assistance, advocacy, connection to local resources.
RCA Housing Services program	Resource and referral, crisis assistance, landlord/tenant mediation, budget counseling, life skills training, security deposit loan program.

Elder Services

The total number of seniors citizens in Portsmouth increased 7.6% from 1990 compared to a fairly stable overall population base.⁶¹ According to the Census 2000, approximately 8% of seniors earned incomes below the federal poverty level. Increasing costs of living put a particular strain on seniors who are often on fixed incomes. According to the United Way 2001 Community Needs Profile, “The elderly in the Greater Seacoast area need greater access to a variety of health and lifestyle-related programs and services.”

⁶¹ Refer to Chapter 1, Population and Social Characteristics for more information on 1990 to 2000 census comparisons and accounting for the closure of Pease Air Force Base.

Specific challenges facing seniors in Portsmouth include transportation, isolation and access to health care services. In Portsmouth, services which exist to help seniors are featured below.

The Portsmouth Senior Citizen Center addresses the needs of seniors by providing socialization, nutrition (a home-cooked meal is served daily), health education, information and referral, exercise and art classes, and rest and relaxation to the elderly and/or disabled person. Transportation to medical appointments and grocery shopping is also offered at the Center.

The Community Council of Senior Citizens is an information distribution center for senior citizens. This agency offers education and job skills development as well as publishes a newsletter for senior citizens.

The Retired and Seniors Volunteer Program (RSVP) matches citizens over 55 years old with volunteer opportunities in the community that take advantage of the individual's experience while helping to solve problems.

Rockingham Nutrition and Meals on Wheels Program subsidizes the cost of providing nutritional meals to elderly and disabled individuals unable to prepare their own meals.

Area HomeCare and Family Services provides assistance with homecare tasks to enable the elderly and individuals with disabilities to remain in their own homes.

Compass Care is a non-profit organization that promotes the "health, independence, and well being" of seniors. It offers adult day care, health and wellness programs, and senior companionship services to Portsmouth's elderly citizens.

Domestic Violence and Abuse Prevention

According to FBI Crime Reporting indices, Portsmouth witnessed 13 incidents of forcible rape and 23 cases of aggravated assault in the year 2001. In the case of rape, this statistic reveals a much higher rate than national indices, and is the only crime category for which the City exceeds national averages.

Sexual Assault Support Services (SASS) provides 24-hour hotline services, crisis intervention and support services to victims/survivors of sexual assault and childhood sexual abuse and their non-offending parents, partners and friends. Last year, SASS served Portsmouth residents with "74 hotline calls, 84 hours of in-person support to 54 residents, 297 hours of support group sessions for 32 residents, 47 information calls, and 72 hours of education and training sessions to 812 students, 98 teachers, and 304 community volunteers."⁶²

A Safe Place provides free shelter and support to victims of domestic abuse.

⁶² City of Portsmouth 2003-2004 Proposed Annual Budget, p. 107.