

Conclusion

This report is only one assessment of the health of Greater Franklin County. It is a work in progress, a visioning process that continues. A process that began in the seventies when local health care leaders united to improve community health and establish the HCC, Maine's first and largest "healthy community" organization. Professor John McKnight, a nationally-renowned leader in community health from Northwestern University, visited the HCC in January of 2003 and was impressed with the strategies and resources the community uses "to build from the inside out". The HCC's Youth to Youth program is based on John McKnight's philosophy to find and mobilize the capacities of all people in order to focus on assets not problems. The program enables teens to take action to improve their schools and communities. Governor John Baldacci recognized the Youth to Youth program in Jay where high school students agreed to build a community park with a fountain. The teens have been working with the town's government and local businesses in order to find land for the park.

Professor McKnight recognized in Greater Franklin County this strong movement towards releasing not only individual capacities but also the power of local organizations and institutions to promote public health. For although Greater Franklin County faces economic hardships, there is a strong direction taken by organizations and institutions to contribute to the community's health. In the HCC alone, there are nine task forces, a mobile health unit, and a team of volunteers, health educators and community health advocates who work together to solve a wide range of problems from poor nutrition to domestic violence. There are also a number of organizations and institutions that enter into strong partnerships with each other in order to improve the area's economic well-being, which strongly influences public health. The large logging and timber industry has several mills and yards that supply free wood and wood products to local people, including artists. Maine Wood Use Recovery allows individuals to create wood furniture and other custom wood products, a growing industry in Greater Franklin County.

Service sector industries, such as tourism, healthcare and education are also contributing to the economic and overall health status of the community. The skiing industry is one of the fastest growing in the nation,

and the healthcare innovations made by Franklin Memorial Hospital have gained national attention. The Western Maine Center for Heart Health, a department of Franklin Memorial Hospital, is internationally recognized for its contributions in cardiovascular care and health prevention in rural communities. Education also plays a vital role and the University of Maine at Farmington has been awarded by US News and World Report the “best public college in the North” for several years.

This assessment has tried to not only recognize the problems or needs of the area, but also its many assets. The community continues to build from the inside out, illustrated by Professor Berringer’s quote in the introduction: “There is nothing like western Maine in all of the United States...a people whose character and commitment sustain them in good times and bad.”