

FCH celebrates 10 years of service

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HARLEM VALLEY — It's been one decade since the Foundation for Community Health (FCH) was created, and in that time the public charity has served as a valuable community resource to residents in New York's northeastern Dutchess and southeastern Columbia counties as well as Connecticut's northwestern Litchfield County. On Monday, April 8, the Dutchess County Legislature bestowed a special commendation on the foundation for its past accomplishments, as well as the good work it promises to continue in the future.

"I've been familiar with their efforts in northeastern Dutchess as long as I've been elected, and I'm always impressed with their level of commitment to the area," said Dutchess County Legislator Michael Kelsey (R-District 25). "The services they provide are meeting needs previously unmet, and are all great things for an under-served area. So when I know their anniversary was up this year, and 10 years is a long time, I felt they were deserving of recognition both in their area and the whole county."

"A lot of my colleagues are from the western part of the county and don't have familiarity with the northeastern part of the county, let alone a group based in Sharon, Conn.," he added.

Dover's Katie Palmer-House has been a board member of FCH since 2006, has served as its secretary and is currently the board's chairwoman.

"Seeing first-hand the good work being done, and the county's recognition of that good work, was awesome," she said. "The work is always meaningful, and to have a respected organization realize that, it just really encourages you to want to reach for better and more."

The Foundation for Community



From left, Foundation for Community Health (FCH) Chair Katie Palmer-House, FCH Director of Communications & Special Programs Gertrude O'Sullivan, FCH Executive Director Nancy Beaton and Dutchess County Legislators Michael Kelsey, Alan Soroman and Debra Blalock were all present to celebrate the foundation's commendation by the Legislature on Monday, April 8.

Health is located in Sharon, Conn. Its motto is prevention, access, collaboration. It does that and more by awarding grants, conducting research, providing technical and program development assistance, promoting collaboration and supporting advocacy for the benefit of the community, according to the commendation.

"The Foundation for Community Health is dedicated to improving the physical and mental health of the residents of its community with a primary focus on access to services, and health and mental health, and transportation," the award contained.

FCH Director of Communications and Special Programs Gertrude O'Sullivan said the award reflects the agency's dedication to its mission.

"This work has been particularly gratifying for me now that we are beginning to see and hear informa-

tion that indicates that we have been able to make meaningful differences in the day-to-day lives of the people living in our community," she said. "I am honored that we received the commendation from the Dutchess County Legislature and feel that our accomplishments are a reflection of our teamwork with our granters and colleagues and I look forward to continuing this work."

Examples of some of FCH's work includes the creation of a dental clinic at Hudson River Healthcare and an at-school dental program at Dover Elementary School — expected to reduce cavities in third-graders by more than 50 percent in less than five years. That's based on the success of a pilot program in neighboring Connecticut. The foundation has also helped fund more than 10,000 dental procedures in children including fill-

ings, extractions, sealants and fluoride treatments.

In terms of mental health, FCH has provided support to thousands of children, with more than 10,000 participating in various prevention programs to help deal with issues like bullying, substance use and abuse and violence.

The foundation also has helped residents through the Prescription Assistance Fund, with more than \$1 million of support.

Then there's the foundation's commitment to finding transportation solutions in the region. It helped establish Northeast Dutchess Transit, a Dial-A-Ride service for senior Dutchess County that provided nearly 2,500 rides for more than 400 riders in its first year of operation, according to the commendation.

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coming to FCH.

"It's been tremendous," said FCH Executive Director Nancy Beaton. "Specifically in the area of transportation, that's the real story. Now there is a Dial-A-Ride that is actually picking up people and taking them places where they want to go when all other past attempts seemed minuscule."

In fact, before the foundation stepped in northeastern Dutchess County was down to practically no bus service at all, as the county had made massive cuts to its daily Local Bus service that severely affected the Harlem Valley. "Our goal is to make sure services are evenly distributed throughout the county and in eastern Dutchess County."

"What's a unique specialty of the foundation," added Palmer-House, "is that we're not only a grant maker and a research facilitator, because we actually help commission studies in areas where we don't see research done, but we're a capacity builder, so in those terms the foundation works shoulder-to-shoulder with grantees to help make solutions that match more impactful."

Kelsey agreed. "I think what's important is that the foundation works to empower groups that are already existing, it works with the schools, Hudson River Healthcare, the North East Community Center — I feel that they are empowering groups already here as well as looking on new initiatives."

Beaton said that's the goal, and knowing the county is now taking notice is a big incentive to keep moving forward.

"I think the county took notice and sees we're here for the long haul," she said. "We're not just responsive on the short term but here for the long term, and we're willing to work with their departments closely... to make sure rural considerations are made... to make sure rural communities are represented."

Beaton said she hopes the next five years bring the foundation the opportunity to increase its ability to make positive changes in the community and "to make it stronger by looking at issues relevant to our areas but not determined by funding sources but by the community itself."