

*Highlights From the 75-year
History of the Suffolk Community Council, Inc.*

The Beginning:

- Social workers, educators and concerned citizens came together in 1933 to form a voluntary association of professional and community people concerned about improving health and welfare services in Suffolk County, particularly for those hardest hit by the Depression.
- They met originally as separate East End and West End groups, also several times a year in Riverhead as one Council.
- The 1952 Bylaws gave their purpose to be promotion of the general welfare of the community through such activities as the study of community needs and resources; the promotion of social improvement; cooperative planning for health, welfare, and educational services; and the creation of public opinion.
- The Council was formally incorporated in 1964.

Issues Identified/ Problems studied:

- Although the Council began in 1933 largely as a voluntary group of individual members, they soon complemented their group by professionals active in many fields of health and human services.
- As first a “Community Service Council” they focused study on identifying problems, advocating for and then participating in the development of services to meet emerging needs, with the Council often serving as a sponsor or host for fledgling organizations and agencies.
- They defined their principal role as a planning council, the Council served as the vehicle to plan and mobilize resources to meet the needs of people in each community, ranging from youth to the aging and persons with a variety of special needs.

Some Highlights:

- **1951:** Mental Health was that year’s focus and an SCC committee was formed. The Mental Health Association of Suffolk was formed during 1951-52.
- **1951:** Schools were surveyed as to the unmet needs of children for dental care.
- **1952:** projects included researching the need for a vocational high school, a mental health clinic, youth community groups and programs to prevent delinquency.
- **1953:** A sheltered workshop committee was formed to consider vocational planning for the persons with disabilities which in 1954 became “Skills Unlimited.” By June 1955 over 100 had applied to participate.

Highlights continued...

- **1956:** Supported a non-sectarian agency to provide family casework service in all parts of the county. To fill this gap their recommendation was to expand The Service League of Huntington Township Inc. to a wider countywide agency; this became **The Family Service League**. A full-time executive director, Robert Berglund, was hired who made the changes necessary so that the new agency would meet the national service standards of Family Service America.
- **1958:** A need was recognized for diagnostic services for the Children's Court.
- **1962:** In January Board President Frank Gibson reported to SCC members that "Suffolk is quite free of many of the petty jealousies and 'crash program complexes' that plague other areas. There is a tradition of mutual respect among agencies. Professional workers and their boards seem to work well together." That year the Council organized its work around broad issues of health and social welfare, inviting representatives of all the county's voluntary agencies, professionals and interested citizens to join and participate. Its goals were to identify gaps in services, define high priority unmet problems, propose solutions and create shared responsibility for bringing about timely solutions, a mission still maintained today.
- **1964:** The Council was incorporated, established an office and prepared to hire its first staff. Prior to this all council activity was conducted by its Board and committees.
- **1965:** The LI Builders Institute generously offered to donate space and Catholic Charities offered to share its office space in Commack. The first office actually established was at the Suffolk Academy of Medicine. The first secretary was hired (part-time).
- **1966:** The first Executive Director was hired.
- **1969:** Council held its 2nd Board Members Institute, with a focus on how to establish mutual respect for cultural differences, deepening community relation and how to be an effective board member.
- **1970:** History was brought near when world-renowned anthropologist Margaret Mead addressed the Council at a luncheon in Patchogue. Her remarks still sound remarkably contemporary today.
- **1970:** SCC received a County grant of \$10,000, reflecting its support of the public-private partnership SCC had established with county government and its various departments. County support of SCC has continued to this day.
- **1971:** A Council meeting brought attention to the need to address alcoholism along with other forms of substance abuse.

Highlights continued...

- **1972:** Recognizing the need for volunteers the Council applied to the National Center for Voluntary Action and received start-up funds to create a Voluntary Action Center in Suffolk. Funding was also received to set up a Retired Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP), fully sponsored and supported by SCC.
- **1974:** To increase availability and alternative choices of quality health care the Council sponsored a health care consortium that explored new community health initiatives, possibly including prepaid health care; this venture led to the development of the Community Health Plan of Suffolk and a South Fork Health Initiative where services had been lacking. A South Fork Health center opened in 1978.
- **1981:** The Suffolk Action Coalition was formed and served as the advocacy arm of the Council until 1988.
- **1982:** In addition to gathering and maintaining information on local service needs and gaps in services, the Council served as a major forum for analysis and advocacy on the County, State and Federal Budgets, coalescing individuals and organizations and sustaining ongoing dialogue with government officials to preserve vital services to strengthen and expand human services and for protection of the vulnerable. Leadership was provided through publications, forums and training to help local non-profit agencies achieve economies and find other sources of income to supplement the loss of federal funds.
- **1988 - 90:** A new staff position was created to expand the Council's advocacy role. Areas of concentration chosen were homelessness/housing, malnutrition/hunger; advocacy for the poor, and the role of nonprofit organizations. Agencies met as a Case-to-Cause Network and produced an Emergency Housing Analysis, did Food Stamp Training and Voter Registration, trained enumerators for the 1990 Census, and developed a pre-paid transportation program for use by participants in human service programs. SCC's Hunger and Homelessness program was given oversight over all emergency homeless shelters in the County.
- **1990:** Partnering with United Way of Long Island a Computer Users Group was started to assist and train employees of not-for-profit organizations to adapt to computers - a fairly new but quickly essential business tool. The success of this innovative approach gained SCC national attention.
- **Counterbudget:** This project provided an annual analysis of the County Budget as it would impact each service agency, testimony was given and modifications were suggested to retain and strengthen services.
- The Human Service Action Coalition (HuSAC) was formed to ensure both public and private sectors were aware of the impact of proposed Federal, State and County budget cuts on County residents.

Resource Directories:

- A Community Service Directory, initially a *Directory of Social Agencies*, has been published at least as far back as **1947**, when it was free to members, 50c a copy to all others.
- By **1951** the price was 50c to members, \$1 to non-members, with complimentary copies distributed to schools, doctors and clergy.
- The **1959** edition (36 pp) covering courts and related agencies, education, family and children's services, health and hospitals, institutions and recreation, sold for \$2 each or a quantity discount \$1.50.
- An SCC committee oversaw the preparation and publication of each edition and in the **1960's** the Board considered it the most important single contribution of the Council.
- To help link individuals and families with helping resources, a number of specialized directories were also developed.
- A Directory of Services for Senior Citizens (**1972**) was co-sponsored by SCC; a Directory of Pre-School and Child Care Services; in the early **1980's** SCC published a pocket-size handbook, "Where to Secure Help: a Guide to Social and Health Services in Suffolk."
- Current yearly publications include *a Guide to the Suffolk County Legislature*. A Directory of Resources for Persons with Disabilities will be available in **2008**.
- In **1970** the Directory format was expanded into a loose-leaf binder with topical and alphabetical categories similar to the ones still in use today.
- While the **1982** Human Service Directory had 105 pages, the most recent edition (2006-07) contains 612 pages and sold to members for \$100, \$125 to all others.

Suffolk Community Council

1933 to 2008

Still Going Strong ..