

Thursday, March 18, 2010

Grant could help with youth issues

Vermont has received a \$9 million, six-year grant to help deal with young adults, ages 16 up to 22, who are having problems.

For the Lamoille Valley, the grant means \$57,074 a year for five years.

The program targets young adults facing significant obstacles to becoming successful adults — such things as mental health, substance abuse, health care, education, housing and jobs.

The money comes from the federal Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration; the idea is that helping young adults solve their problems will reduce taxpayer costs over the long term.

For example, young adults with emotional issues use the emergency room for health care at much higher rates than the general population, and are much more likely to bump into the criminal justice system, at a sizeable cost to taxpayers.

In the Morrisville district, 65 young adults up to age 22 are involved with corrections; the number spikes to 151 if young adults up to age 25 are included. About 90 percent of incarcerated young adults in Vermont have no high school diploma.

Dealing with these issues is a partnership: Lamoille Community Connections, Community Health Services of Lamoille Valley, the state Agency for Human Services and Lamoille County Court Diversion; together, they employ and supervise a criminal justice social worker to work intensively with at-risk young adults ages 16 to 22 for periods of up to six months.

The worker's goal is to boost high school completion, improving housing and job opportunities, increase the number of caring relationships in young adults' lives, and prevent further criminal justice system involvement.