

Brattleboro, VT - Today Rep. Peter Welch announced \$235,000 in federal funding for the Big Brothers Big Sisters mentoring program of Windham County at Youth Services in Brattleboro. The funding will allow the program to expand its highly successful youth mentoring program.

Last January, a 3-year \$75,000 annual federal grant for the Big Brothers Big Sisters program ended. Recognizing the success of the program and need for financial support, Welch requested the federal funding be included in the 2008 federal appropriations.

"This Big Brothers Big Sisters program is incredibly successful at providing mentors to at-risk youth across the region. When I heard the pressing need for funding to maintain this excellent program, I wanted to do what I could to help," said Welch. "This new funding will help make a great local program even better and reach even more youth in our area."

Last year alone, Youth Services matched nearly 200 young Windham County children in their award-winning mentoring program.

Allyson Villars, executive director of Youth Services, said "It is important to have more at-risk youth in our region benefit from the mentoring of a Big Brother or Big Sister. With this funding boost from the federal government and the ongoing long-term support of local donors, this key preventative program of ours can now reach its full potential. We're very pleased to have this support," Villars said.

According to Villars, recent surveys of participants in the program demonstrate a 79 percent increase in their self-confidence, 74 percent increase in their ability to express their feelings, 67 percent increase in their decision-making ability, 66 percent increase in their academic performance and their use of school resources, and 61 percent improvement in their attitude towards school.