



## 2008 Key Issue Identification Form

1. In a few words, please come up with a title that succinctly defines the issue:

***The New Hampshire Work and Family Balance Initiative:  
Workplaces, Families and Communities United for New Hampshire's Future***

2. Please describe the issue in 2-3 sentences (i.e. craft an issue statement that describes what the issue at hand is and why it is a significant issue):

**“Communities in New England need the energy, creativity and idealism of younger workers and citizens. They need all the skills and knowledge of a diverse workforce. The aging baby-boom generation is approaching retirement. Legions of new workers are needed to take their places and eventually to take care of them. We need healthy young families to support local schools and demand the quality education that is critical to our future and continuing success in this ever-more competitive global economy,” Lorraine Stuart Merrill, New Hampshire’s Commissioner of Agriculture, Markets and Food (Francese & Merrill, 2008).**

3. In 2-3 sentences, please describe what the public value for Extension to address this issue is/would be.

**There is clear evidence that when workers’ families are healthy, cared for, and safe, individual worker productivity increases and businesses, communities, and economies flourish. There is also evidence that when workplaces provide family-friendly and family supportive, flexible environments, workers are healthier and families are stronger. In addition, flexible work places that allow work/life fit attract and retain younger workers who tend to develop company and community loyalty. Therefore, this initiative has public value in every sector of New Hampshire’s economic, political, community and family life.**

4. Identify and summarize key data that help make the case that this is a key issue (key data might include demographic trend data, University priorities, issues identified in plans/policies of other agencies and organizations, stakeholder input, etc.).

**One of the most pressing, vital and significant issues facing New Hampshire’s future is the need to attract and retain a vibrant, healthy and productive workforce. Analysts agree that a “graying” of the state’s population – increasing numbers of older adults relative to the rest of the population – will continue (Johnson 2007), putting strain on our communities’ abilities to entice young families to live and work here and contributing to what Merrill and others consider an unbalancing of New Hampshire’s human ecology.**

**There is considerable evidence that rural areas (including most of New Hampshire) appear to be hardest hit with familial stress factors. Rural families increasingly live in poverty, are faced with limited job and educational opportunities, are generally paid less than their**

urban counterparts, live farther from their jobs and live in communities lacking in family resources such as quality child care, health care, affordable and adequate housing and accessible transportation (Smith, 2007).

When work and family life intersect negatively, familial stress is created or enhanced (Edlund, 2007). The devastating effects of this type of stress, when caused by such visible factors as job loss, financial illiteracy, poverty, illness, addictions and substance abuse, loss or divorce, etc., in a family setting is well documented.

Another type of less visible stress is created in family systems by an imbalance between the demands of work and family life. Such stressors as caring for a child or a parent with chronic medical needs, housing costs that outpace wages, employers' inability to pay for skyrocketing health care policies, lack of affordable child care in a community, or simply the inability of a family to keep up with rapidly rising fuel and transportation costs can deeply affect both work life and family life by marginalizing an individual's effectiveness in either domain (Middlebrook & Audage, 2008).

In New Hampshire, some recent trends in families have been indicative of this growing stress. More than 70% of New Hampshire's children live in families where all parents work outside the home. Single mothers with young children participate in the labor force at a higher rate than all parents with young children. Nearly 10% of our state's children live in poverty, a percentage that has grown tremendously in the last five years. Over 75% of those children live in single parent families. In addition, all NH families have experienced a decrease in real family income, as the cost of living outpaced the gains in earnings (Children's Alliance, 2007).

Workers undergoing familial stress are more costly to employers, have diminished abilities for production and output, are at work less and tend to use more of their work time for personal needs than their counterparts, and are more likely to utilize costly employee assistance programs (Brandon & Temple, 2007). Thus work/life imbalance has a direct and lasting impact on revenue at the local business, community and state levels. It often prevents businesses from locating in rural areas and small communities where access to family support is limited, it often creates enormous pressure on already stressed human resource budgets, and, ultimately causes production and consumer costs to increase.

5. How does/would addressing this issue tie into UNH Cooperative Extension's Mission?

UNH Cooperative Extension has a proud history of working to prevent or diminish the effects of familial stress, particularly with rural families. In fact, the very mission and vision of UNHCE states that we will use "research-based education and information" to "strengthen youth, families and communities" and to "improve the economy." Thus the mission encompasses the link between families and the economy, or work/life balance. However, although UNHCE has developed many effective evidence-based approaches to help prevent or mitigate stress in families including education efforts in parenting, finances, money management, and nutrition, these programs have generally required that family members make a considerable investment in a dwindling family commodity – time. Consequently, according to an informal survey of 17 UNHCE Family and Consumer Science Educators, and exploration by our Family and Parenting Expert teams, attendance at traditional Extension programs has dwindled as families experience increased working hours, increased pressures, increased driving times, and increasing family stress. This attrition at traditional parent education efforts was echoed in a recent survey of 130 parent educators across New Hampshire (Smith, 2008). Thus, in order to have a significant impact on the problem of family stress, UNHCE must better understand the impediments it creates

to family learning, and to improve our methods and our abilities of reaching working families.

6. What Extension programs/activities, if any, currently address this issue? For each, please succinctly describe how the program/activity addresses the issue.

1. **We are currently conducting extensive research including qualitative and quantitative initiatives to understand the key issues involved in improving work and family balance from all viewpoints, employer, employee, family and community.**
2. **We are developing a Sloan Foundation “When Work Works” program with the Families and Work Institute for the city of Manchester, through the Family Education Collaborative.**
3. **We are producing a monthly, widely disseminated column on work and family balance for the New Hampshire Business Review.**
4. **We are actively participating in the New Hampshire Legislative Task Force on Work and Family.**

7. What other organizations/agencies are currently addressing this issue?

**We are partnering with:**

**The Carsey Institute for research  
The NH Dept. of Employment Security  
The New Hampshire Women’s Lobby  
The New Hampshire Dept. of Health and Human Services  
The UNH Small Business Development Institute  
The New Hampshire Association of Human Resource Professionals,**

**And, many other agencies. However, this is a disjointed and sporadic effort that needs to be fully coordinated and integrated into public dialogue, education and policy. Our role will be to serve as the catalyst, convener and neutral organizer.**

8. If Extension does not currently address this issue, how might we address this issue in the future? (Consider staff capacity, financial resources, volunteer capacity, and potential partnerships with other agencies/organizations, etc.).

**Once we have adequate evidence and research basis, we should develop programs for employers, for employees that reach them in their workplaces, and for family members that reach them in the home utilizing new methodology and technology.**

**Form Submitted by: Malcolm L. Smith, PhD.**

**Date: October 15, 2008**

**Representing: Family and Consumer Sciences**