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—Contributor.....(Building A Positive Community), Andrea Butler
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Notes from editor (not for publication):

HEADLINE ELEMENTS:

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1 Brattleboro Youth Council empowers young leaders to
2 shape community change

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4 TEXT BODY:

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5 For more than thirty years, local nonprofit Building a
6 Positive Community (BAPC) has grown into a trusted community
7 partner dedicated to supporting the health, safety, and well-being
8 of the people of Windham County.

9 One of the ways that BAPC has found success in
10 reaching their goals is by continuing to innovate through youth-
11 driven approaches.

12 In 2022, the Brattleboro Area Youth Council was created
13 after partnering with Vermont Afterschool. The Youth Council
14 works towards creating inclusive opportunities for social
15 connections across diverse groups, empowering youth to
16 influence community change and participate in decision making
17 processes, and engaging youth in leadership roles to benefit the
18 community and build stronger, more resilient relationships
19 between generations.

20 With members aged 12 to 18 from LGBTQ+, BIPOC,
21 low-income, and disability communities, the Youth Council leads
22 initiatives on shared power in schools, civic engagement,
23 downtown safety and belonging, and vocational exploration.

24 “These initiatives ensure young people shape solutions
25 that change their lives,” said BAPC Director Cassandra Holloway.

26 The Youth Council seeks to directly address and improve
27 bridging the gap in youth involvement as well as fostering an
28 improved sense of belonging. 

29 Mariam Diallo has been on the Youth Council since its
30 inception almost six years ago.

31 Since the start of Youth Council, Diallo said, “I’ve seen it
32 grow not only in membership, but in process and mission. Our
33 influence and voice have developed so much, and I can really
34 see change starting to happen.”

35 One of the major initiatives of the council is providing
36 growth and problem-solving concerns for community safety and
37 inclusion. The Youth Council has identified youth friendly
38 businesses in downtown Brattleboro and has begun to build
39 relationships between business owners and the youth of the area,
40 creating a common understanding of the value that both the
41 businesses and the youth bring to cultivating a positive
42 experience for everyone spending time downtown.

43 In late 2025, Youth Council hosted a Community Safety
44 Conversation that drew people from across the Windham
45 Southeast Supervisory Union (WSESU) which includes all WSESU
46 schools as well as The Putney School. The gathering included

47 youth, parents, and alocal and state leaders across government,
48 law enforcement, and the judiciary.

49 Together, the youth and adult leaders created a
50 comprehensive list of actionable ways to which they were willing
51 to commit by exploring some of southern Vermont's societal,
52 economic, and cultural problems in order to build a better
53 community for everyone.

54 The Youth Council works on sustaining partnerships
55 between youth and community leaders by ensuring youth have a
56 meaningful seat at the table in town and school decision-making
57 processes that directly affect their lives.

58 In 2025, 106 students attended two middle school
59 leadership trainings, 11 youth attended a community
60 conversation on downtown safety, and 40 Brattleboro Union
61 High School and Windham Regional Career Center students
62 attended a health career exploration event put on by the Southern
63 Vermont Health and Education Center.

64 Members of the Youth Council recently met with WSESU
65 administrators to explore strategies for improving student
66 attendance and engagement. The discussion emphasized that
67 both are closely tied to students' sense of belonging and the
68 relationships they build at school.

69 Participants identified mental health challenges, limited
70 connections to trusted adults, and disengaging classroom
71 experiences as key barriers. Proposed solutions centered on
72 restorative, relationship-based approaches that elevate student
73 voice and strengthen connections between students, teachers,
74 and school counselors.

75 "I'm proud to help with shared power in schools because
76 [youth] need a voice, and I think it's amazing that we can have
77 this opportunity," said Youth Council member Elise Denaples-
78 Hiler.

79 Members of the Brattleboro Area Youth Council are
80 advancing several youth-led initiatives focused on strengthening
81 their schools and community.

82 Through the Community Safety and Belonging initiative,
83 youth are planning inclusive events and community-building
84 activities to foster greater connection and belonging, particularly
85 between youth and unhoused community members.

86 The Brattleboro Youth Civic Engagement Drive, a
87 committee of the Youth Council, is working to register 100 people
88 to vote by the March 2027 local elections, with a goal of at least
89 60% participation from registered youth voters.

90 Meanwhile, the Shared Power in Schools initiative is
91 working to increase student voice, improve school justice
92 practices, and address student disengagement by partnering with
93 educators and administrators to create more supportive,
94 equitable, and engaging learning environments.

95 Through the Youth Council, BAPC expands opportunities
96 for youth to engage in their community and demonstrates they
97 are valued partners and leaders whose perspectives matter by the
98 work that they do.

99 In its end of year evaluation, members said their favorite
100 part of being on the Youth Council is the strong sense of
101 community and belonging they have built with one another. They
102 value the supportive, welcoming environment, opportunities to
103 develop leadership skills, meaningful connections with peers and
104 community members, and the ability to use their voices to create
105 positive change while ensuring every member can contribute
106 their own unique ideas and perspectives.

107 BAPC and Youth Council is seeking sponsorships and is
108 grateful for the donations from 802 Credit Union and Elks Lodge
109 #1499. One exciting initiative to highlight is the Brattleboro Area
110 Youth Council's partnership with Vermont Afterschool, which
111 provided \$2,500 in funding for youth-led mini grants.

112 Each year, the Youth Council invites project proposals —
113 big or small — that bring people together through skill-building
114 and meaningful connections. Projects are reviewed and
115 ultimately funded through a voting process led by Brattleboro

116 youth, giving young people a direct role in shaping and investing
117 in their community.

118 If you are a youth, or know someone who might like to
119 join the council, or if you are a local business and you'd like to
120 help support and get involved, visit youthcouncil802.org or reach
121 out to youthcouncil802@gmail.com.

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BIO/COATTAIL:

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122 **ANDREA BUTLER** is the communications coordinator for
123 Building a Positive Community (BAPC).Â The Commons' Deeper
124 Dive column gives artists, arts organizations, and other nonprofits
125 elbow room to write in first person and be unabashedly
126 opinionated, passionate, and analytical about their own creative
127 work and events.

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