



Meeting Needs | Changing Lives

SEVCA

SOUTHEASTERN VERMONT COMMUNITY ACTION

2013–14 Annual Report

Message from the Executive Director

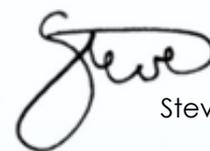
I feel truly privileged to be serving as SEVCA's Executive Director as we celebrate such an important milestone in the organization's history...50 years of combatting the causes and effects of poverty on behalf of tens of thousands of Southeastern Vermont residents. And I feel humbled to have the responsibility to help lead the SEVCA team of dedicated staff and Board members in our first steps on the path toward the next 50 years of meeting people's needs and changing their lives.

This past year, I achieved my own significant milestone, completing my 10th year at SEVCA! I've been enormously proud to have been able to work with so many individuals who are so committed to this honorable mission. Many of them also have a long and productive history at SEVCA – 10, 15, 20, even 25 years. Their dedication has created continuity and a community at SEVCA that has enabled it to weather five decades of challenges and still provide critical services consistently and reliably for all those years. I'm glad to have been associated with such a great crew and to have played a meaningful role in equipping SEVCA to keep fighting the War on Poverty at a high level of effectiveness now and into the future.

When President Lyndon Johnson declared an unconditional War on Poverty in 1964, he made it clear that America needed to commit to fighting these shameful conditions with the same vigor and perseverance that we as a nation have exhibited in more traditional kinds of war. "It will not be a short or easy struggle," he said. "No single weapon or strategy will suffice, but we shall not rest until that war is won."

And that's just how SEVCA has approached this challenge: We've experienced great triumphs overcoming significant frustrations; successes arising out of setbacks; rewards as well as penalties; times of surplus following scarcity; in other words, a veritable roller coaster of highs and lows over our long history.

But through it all, often with the odds stacked against us, we've managed to keep our focus on our mission and vision – helping people cope with poverty's hardships, stabilize their lives, move toward self-sufficiency, and overcome the root causes of poverty – and will hopefully continue to stay focused on it...even if it takes us another half century, or longer, to achieve it. We've come this far and we're not about to rest now!



Steve Geller



Staff from SEVCA and other Vermont Community Action Agencies attending the annual National Community Action Foundation Conference greet Senator Bernie Sanders, one of the conference's keynote speakers. From L to R: David Rubin, Capstone Community Action; Pat Burke, SEVCA; Steve Geller, SEVCA; Sen. Sanders; Kevin Wiberg, Capstone; Carol Flint, BROOC; Denis Mason, SEVCA.

Board of Directors

Oct. 2013–Present

- Kimberly Bovill, President
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Community Action Agencies and the War on Poverty: The Early Years

The 50th Anniversary of the War on Poverty inspires us to revisit the origins of Community Action Agencies, which were set up as the key institutions in the nationally coordinated effort to end poverty in the U.S. Are the founding values and purpose of the CAAs still relevant today?

Excerpted from "A History of Community Action" by Jim Masters, President of the Center for Community Futures. It was presented at the Community Action Partnership 50th Anniversary Convention, August 2014. (<http://www.cencomfut.com/>)

1962 Michael Harrington publishes *The Other America*, generating widespread awareness and outrage about the plight of the poor, and influencing the Kennedy administration's anti-poverty strategies.

February, 1964 Johnson asks Sargent Shriver, head of the Peace Corps, to draft new legislation to spearhead the War on Poverty programs. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 is passed to end racial discrimination.

1965-67 Local CAAs are established (including SEVCA); by 1967 there are almost 1,800 covering over two-thirds of the nation's counties. They received federal "local initiative funds" to use in their anti-poverty efforts, and developed programs based on a wide variety of locally-defined needs. Masters describes how the **CAAs worked to change public policy in which "opportunities were given only to the 'deserving poor' to a public policy where aid and opportunities were open to all who were eligible for it—regardless of race or other factors."**

1968-69 CAAs managed "massive nationwide outreach programs" to sign people up for the new federal Food Stamp and Medicaid programs. Other programs implemented by CAAs included Head Start, family planning, community health centers, Legal Services, economic development, neighborhood centers, summer youth programs, adult basic education, senior centers, and congregate meal programs. CAAs were seen as innovators that developed programs to meet local needs, many of which spun off into independent programs or organizations.

Enduring Anti-Poverty Role of Community Action Agencies.

CAAs faced numerous challenges and variations in funding from many subsequent federal administrations, but strong local support has always been a key factor in maintaining funding for CAAs. The Community Services Block Grant (CSBG) became the flexible federal resource for CAAs in the early 1980s, which CAAs have continued to use to leverage support from numerous funding sources: by 2012, every CSBG dollar leveraged \$22.74 in other funding. CAAs now cover 97% of the nation's counties. However, Masters points out that major structural changes in the U.S. economy since the 1970s, stemming from a corporate shift to direct profits to managers and investors rather than sharing profits with workers, and the erosion of the public safety net, have made the task even harder. While these are challenging times, Masters concludes that **"The philosophy of eliminating 'the paradox of poverty in the midst of plenty' and strengthening economic security and expanding economic opportunity remain key concepts that motivate CAAs today. The commitments are solid, the framework is strong, the purposes are legitimate...."** And he urges us to **"re-make this 'new normal' of an economy into something that works for everybody."**

January, 1964 Lyndon B. Johnson declares "an unconditional War on Poverty in America" in his State of the Union Address, saying **"Our joint Federal-local effort must pursue poverty, pursue it wherever it exists....Our aim is not only to relieve the symptom of poverty, but to cure it and, above all, to prevent it."**

August, 1964. The Economic Opportunity Act is passed, creating the Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO) as well as new education, employment, and work experience programs such as the Job Corps, Neighborhood Youth Corps, Volunteers in Service to America (VISTA), and the Community Action Program, with Community Action Agencies leading local anti-poverty efforts. Shriver serves as head of OEO until 1969.

1967 Many locally elected officials objected to the CAAs because they were considered "power blocks" outside of their control. In response, Congress passed the Green Amendment that required CAAs in each jurisdiction to be designated by locally-elected officials. Congress also passed the Quie Amendment, which determined the Board structure for CAAs that still exists today: 1/3 elected officials, at least 1/3 low-income representatives elected by a democratic process, and up to 1/3 representatives from the private sector. Masters says that while this was controversial, ultimately it proved to be a strength: **"... the CAA board became the arena for local officials, the business sector, and low income people to have a dialogue and to reach agreement on the policies, self-help activities, and programs to help their community."**



Sergeant Shriver, Director of the Office of Economic Opportunity, visits poor communities in the U.S. to help formulate strategies for the War on Poverty.

Photo used with permission of the Sargent Shriver Peace Institute.

“We Never Would Have Been Able to Stay In This Big, Beautiful House”

When SEVCA's Weatherization crew came out to Janice and Ted Hastings' historic home in Perkinsville during the winter of 2013-14, Janice and Ted were wearing winter clothing and huddled in blankets day and night trying to stay warm. The home, first built in 1790, had been in Ted's family for generations, and when his mother died in 2009 at the age of 99, Ted, now 81, was determined to keep it in the family. He and Janice moved in with plans to stay throughout their retirement, but they had little idea of the difficulties they would face.

“There was absolutely no insulation in the walls,” Ted says. And someone had stolen the copper pipe throughout the house as well as two clawfoot bathtubs. The



Ted and Janice Hastings

WEATHERIZATION Outcomes in FY2014

242 homes were weatherized, resulting in an estimated average energy savings of approximately 25% per household.

89 homes received emergency heating system repairs or replacements valued at \$128,349.

35 homes received emergency home repairs valued at \$125,486.

cellar was full of puffy, white mold. Ted replaced the plumbing on his own, but he knew he needed help to make the house livable, since they couldn't afford further repairs on their fixed incomes. Janice contacted SEVCA to get help.

“They saved us!” Janice exclaims, “We never would have been able to stay in this big, beautiful house if it wasn't for the Weatherization program.” In fact, the Hastings benefitted from two of SEVCA's programs—the Emergency Home Repair Program was brought in first, since, due to the wet, moldy, basement, the home would not have been able to be weatherized. EHR paid for a trench to be dug and piping put in to drain the water away from the house. Once that work was completed, the Weatherization crew was brought in. They insulated the walls and knee wall areas, airsealed and insulated attic areas, and put in energy-efficient bulbs and a fan to vent the moisture in the bathroom.

“SEVCA made all the difference,” Janice says. “They were professional and hardworking. Now, the temperature is even no matter where you go...we're very happy!” Ted and Janice paid around \$5,000 to heat their home the first winter they stayed there, and they were still cold. This past winter, as cold as it was, their total fuel cost was only about \$1,300.

“I never in my wildest dreams thought I would need a program like this,” Ted said. “I worked until I was 75 years old. But the Weatherization program gave us a life here, and we're very grateful.” Ted and Janice hope to return this 27-acre property to its intended purpose as agricultural land one day. They'd like to restore the barn and perhaps raise livestock. But for now, they are happy just to enjoy being together, comfortable and warm in their home.



“Changing One Tire Changed My Life”

It is not an exaggeration to say that 48-year-old Gary Merrill has turned his life around. Substance abuse and domestic assault charges have landed him in jail more than once, but during his last 4-year sentence, Gary changed his mind about the life he wanted to live. He accepted accountability for what he had done in his past, and he started to believe in a better future. And when that happened, SEVCA's Microbusiness and Individual Development Account (IDA) programs were just some of the tools available to help.

Gary first met Karen Woodcock, SEVCA's IDA Coordinator, when he took a microbusiness class while incarcerated at the Southern State Corrections Facility.



He says these workshops "...took away some of my fear of the unknown. They taught me to think outside the box." At the time, he was earning \$4.00/day as Head Chef. He learned about the IDA program and, with Karen's help, Gary put together a business plan for a tire-changing and balancing business he planned to launch when he was released. He opened his IDA account and meticulously saved \$42 per month, starting in prison and continuing after his release in October 2013. "The only thing I was holding onto was the IDA," he said. "It was a slow process, but I never gave up."

Then an amazing turn of events occurred. When Gary was released, he was unable to find steady work, and he still had a long way to go towards his savings goal. One day, he noticed the newspaper carrier's car stuck on the side of the road with a flat and a damaged tire rim, the driver nowhere in sight. He decided to help, so he jacked up the car, removed the damaged tire, and took it back to his home to fix. When he returned, the driver was back, and was pleasantly surprised to find his

tire fixed. Within a few weeks, Gary had a temporary job as a result of a recommendation from the carrier, and within a year, it turned into a full-time, higher-paying job with benefits.

A few months ago, Gary reached his savings goal of \$1,000, received \$2,000 in matching funds, and purchased the equipment he would need to start his business. He now plans to keep his full-time job and operate his business on the side. "The equipment is all paid for... and I can change tires until I'm 80, so this is part of my retirement plan!" he says.

Karen's help was, simply, "...indispensable," Gary enthused. "She always stayed in contact, and basically told me what I needed to do in the order I needed to do it." With a good job, a great boss, and the equipment to fulfill his dream of running his own business, Gary is incredibly grateful for how his life has changed. He's now best friends with the newspaper carrier, too! Although Gary says, "I never thought that changing one tire would change my life," it is clear that his own hard work and dedication, as well SEVCA's assistance, played a key role in bringing about that change.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT Outcomes in FY2014

45 households increased their assets, earning a total savings match of \$52,314 via the Individual Development Account program.

63 entrepreneurs received counseling & support for new or existing businesses.

278 households (834 people) received help to access affordable health insurance through the Health Navigator program.

426 households claimed \$344,076 in credits and refunds via tax preparation assistance.

“Budgeting was a challenge...Now I got it all figured out!”

Last August, 54-year-old Michele Schoolcraft felt a wave of panic when she received a notice from her landlord requiring her to pay the two month's back rent she owed or face eviction. Today, Michele is up-to-date with her rent and in control of her budget. “My budget is in order of priority, and rent is first on my list,” she explains. How did this transformation occur? For Michele, it was a process of ongoing budgeting counseling and advocacy provided by Family Services that made all the difference.

Michele lives on a fixed income, and unexpected extra expenses had led to a situation where she could not pay all her bills. Since rent was her biggest expense, that was what didn't get paid, and soon she and her 16-year-old son were at risk of losing their housing. Having heard about SEVCA's Homelessness Prevention Program, Michele visited our Brattleboro office for help. It was clear to Housing Case Manager Susan Howes that SEVCA couldn't simply pay her back rent, which was over \$800. Michele also needed to show she could take responsibility for her budget, or she might end up right back where she started.

Susan negotiated with Michele's landlord to allow her to pay \$100 a month toward her arrears, and began working with her on the budget. Michele's initial draft was “totally unrealistic” according to Susan, but eventually “her awareness and interest in it increased and so did her skill level.” Michele admits that she was lax about it at first. When her husband was alive, she was required to live on a very strict budget, so when it fell



to her to begin making spending decisions, she gave herself more leeway than she should have. Being faced with eviction forced her to confront her finances head-on. “I needed to start changing my thinking,” Michele says. “I decided: I don't want to fail, I don't want to be in debt to anybody. I paid more attention and I saw results, and it made me feel really good.”

Once she had control of her budget and had made a substantial dent in her arrears, SEVCA helped her apply for a small loan from the local Save Our Homes program (with a \$25/month repayment plan), and gave her a small amount of rental assistance to clear her arrears completely. “Susan is really passionate about her job and she wants to see people succeed,” Michele says. “She made me feel that I have the ability to take care of what I need to and still have extra for things I want. Budgeting was a challenge... now I got it all figured out! I keep track of everything I spend, and if I stay within budget I can treat myself once a month.”

Michele is now setting aside money for a cross-country trip to Colorado this summer to visit her daughter, whom she hasn't seen in six years. This is something she couldn't have imagined being able to do just a few months ago. Her three grandchildren, two of whom will be meeting their grandmother for the first time, are sure to be just as thrilled as Michele is to finally get this chance to be together.

FAMILY SERVICES Outcomes in FY2014

**1,688 households received
\$600,992 in crisis fuel assistance**

**478 households received \$250,255
in emergency housing assistance**

**2,011 households (4508 people)
received 13,768 diverse services
from Family Services staff**

**17 households (42 people) received
\$31,235 in disaster recovery
assistance**



“ My daughter is exuberantly outgoing and happy with the world!”

In many ways, Tommy Borrell Jr. is like any proud father of a 3½-year-old girl—he’s enthusiastic about all her accomplishments, he thinks she’s the sweetest, smartest child that ever lived, and he would do anything for her. But unlike most, Tommy has had to go to great lengths to ensure his child, Isabella, is in a safe, healthy environment, having taken full-time custody of his child about 6 months ago. This transition has not been easy, and he had to leave his job and his home behind in Florida to do what he thought was best for her. And he is glad that Head Start was there to give Isabella a place to “play, interact with other kids, and focus on just being a kid!”

“Now that she has her needs met, Isabella has made tremendous strides,” Tommy says. Isabella gained 6 pounds in 6 months and is near the middle of the height-weight percentile for her age, partly due to the healthy meals and snacks at Head Start, whereas before she was almost underweight. She is now potty trained and drinks from a regular cup. And her language and number skills, along with her curiosity and creative expression have “exploded!” says Tommy. Since he doesn’t have a car, Head Start has often helped this single father



with transportation to make sure his daughter could attend, and also recently hired him as a cook, which keeps him close and makes it easy for him to visit with his daughter in the afternoons.

“My daughter is now exuberantly outgoing and happy with the world!” Tommy gushes, “Whereas before she was that way just with me.” With Head Start’s support, Isabella is sure to continue to thrive.

“Get involved in Policy Council—you learn a lot more than you might think!”

...That’s the advice Crystal Zimnick has for parents of children in Head Start. “Now that I’ve been on the Policy Council for two years, I can be a good advocate for others to get involved.” Crystal loves having the opportunity to help make decisions and set policy for Head Start, saying, “It’s fun because you really see what goes into the program behind the scenes.”

Crystal first joined the Policy Council at the suggestion of another parent who she had become close friends with. It was hard for her at first to imagine making the effort to get involved. Due to a series of traumas that included almost losing her life while giving birth to her youngest child, Samuel (now 4 years old), the death of her mother, and even becoming homeless, Crystal said she had withdrawn into herself and “It wasn’t until recently that I felt good enough to come out of my shell.” But because she felt strongly about the value of the program, it was time to try.

Having had several children enrolled in Head Start before Samuel, Crystal has a great deal of experience

with the program. “I love the Head Start setting, the mixing of ages that helps them develop social skills.” She credits the Head Start program with giving her children the “educational boost” they need to be ready for kindergarten. “They’ve benefitted so much from Head Start,” Crystal says, and so has she—from friendships she’s made, knowledge she’s gained, and the support provided to her family. Though Samuel will be moving on to kindergarten next year and Crystal will no longer be involved on the Policy Council, they will both take with them the skills they’ve learned and the positive experiences they’ve had.

100 Windsor County families (comprising 413 individuals) received comprehensive early childhood education and family support from our Head Start program in FY2014.

“I’m Very Proud to Work Here”



Ann Pacific in front of SEVCA's Bellows Falls Good Buy Thrift Store.

THRIFT STORE AND TEXTILE RECYCLING Outcomes in FY2014

We employed 20 people and provided 60 volunteers with skills-building and community service placement opportunities. (4,681 volunteer hours contributed).

228 households in need obtained \$10,732 in free clothing and furniture from our thrift stores.

We recycled 285 tons of textiles that otherwise would have ended up in landfills.

With a painful history as a victim of domestic abuse, substance abuse problems, two young children, and very little work experience, Ann Pacific had a lot to overcome when she tried to enter the workforce 15 years ago. “I had been out of the workforce for five years,” Ann recalls. “I was very nervous about going back to work. I had very low self-esteem and I barely spoke to anybody.” The state *Reach Up* program for public assistance recipients had placed her as a volunteer at SEVCA's Good Buy Thrift Store, and after a short time, a paid position became available. Ann decided to apply. “I didn't think I was special enough to have a job, so I was really excited when I got this one,” she says.

“Ann was very shy when she came here to volunteer” remembers Thrift Store Director Tonia White. “But she opened up and really showed us she was a hard worker when we did on-the-job training with her, so we were confident in her abilities when we hired her. Since then, she has been an asset to the Thrift Store, always willing to help our customers.”

The Thrift Store gave Ann an opportunity to develop skills and abilities she didn't think she had, and her job served as an anchor in her turbulent life. “I found I was good at interacting with customers,” she says, “and I became more outgoing. This job helped me to focus my opinions. It helped me to teach my daughter that you can have a career and be a mother at the same time.”

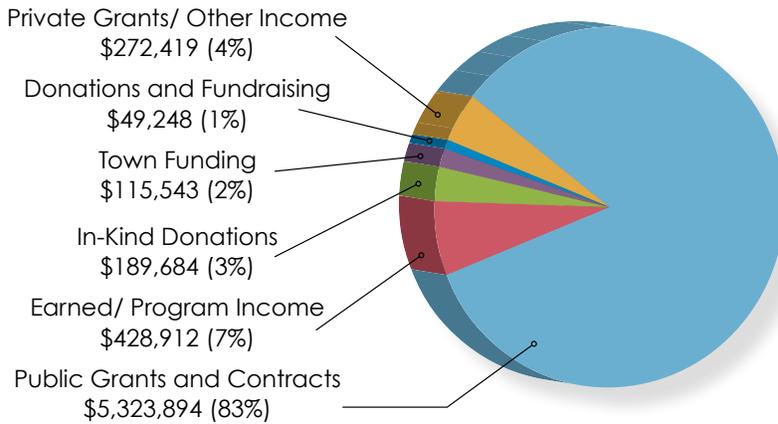
Ann has now been working at the Thrift Store for 15 years. She says her job has been an important source of support for her, not just financially, but emotionally. “This job showed me that people could like me for who I was. I was down on my luck and they helped me,” she says. “I'm very proud to work here, since they gave me the tools I needed to be a better person. Now I feel good that I can help somebody else when they need someone to talk to.”

The Good Buy Thrift Stores provide numerous training opportunities every year for people with little work history or other barriers to entering the workforce. We have provided work experience for at least 30 Reach Up participants over the past 15 years



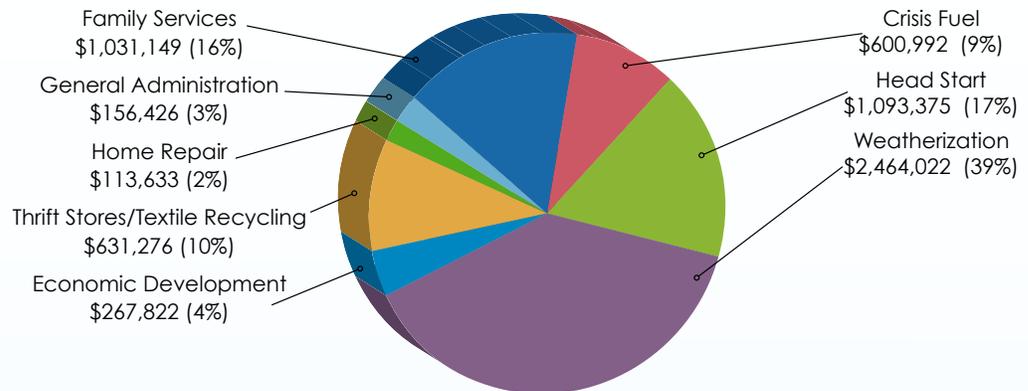
FY 2014 Financial Summary

FY14 Revenue and Other Support



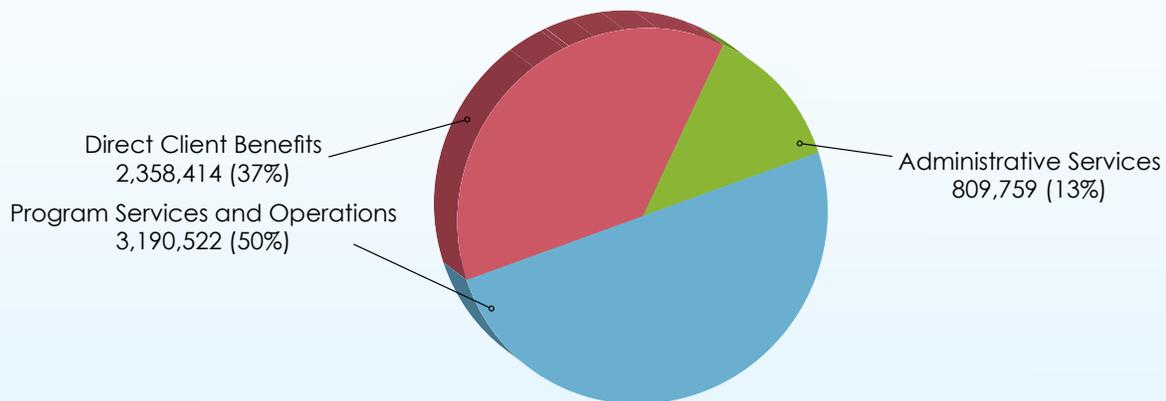
TOTAL \$6,379,700

FY14 Uses of Funds by Program



TOTAL \$6,358,695

FY2014 Allocation of Expenses



TOTAL \$6,358,695

FUNDING SOURCES FY2014

SEVCA would like to thank all of our funders and donors for helping us to achieve our mission. You have made it possible for us to assist 13,157 people with lower incomes (5,713 households) in the past year.

DIRECT FEDERAL

Dept. of Health & Human Services (HHS)

Head Start Grant

Dept. of Agriculture (USDA)

Housing Preservation Grant (HPG)

FEDERAL VIA STATE

Agency of Human Services (AHS)

Dept. for Children & Families (DCF)

- Crisis Fuel Assistance (HHS / LIHEAP)
- Child & Adult Care Food Program (USDA / CACFP)
- 3Squares Vermont (USDA / SNAP)

Office of Economic Opportunity

- Community Services Block Grant (HHS / CSBG)
- Emergency Food & Shelter Program (EFSP)
- Job Start Grant (USDA / SNAP)

Dept. of Labor

Workforce Investment Board (WIB)

FEDERAL VIA OTHER SOURCES

Capstone Community Action

FEMA Disaster Case Management

Supportive Services for Veteran

Families (SSVF)

Individual Development Accounts

(IDA)

Champlain Valley OEO (CVOEO)

Vermont Health Connect Navigator

Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA)

Connecticut Association for Community Action (CAFCA)

Regional Performance & Innovation

Consortium (RPIC)

STATE OF VERMONT

Agency of Human Services (AHS)

Dept. for Children & Families (DCF)

- Community Housing Grants (CHG)
- Childcare Subsidies
- Challenges for Change (via HCRS)
- Financial Fitness
- Vermont Health Connect Navigator
- S.E. Long-Term Recovery Committee (SELTRC)

Office of Economic Opportunity

- Weatherization (WTF / HWAP / EHSRP)
- Micro Business Development Program (MBDP)
- Emergency Solutions Grant (ESG)

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Leland & Gray Union High School

Springfield School District

Two Rivers Supervisory Union

Towns of:

Andover

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Greater Hartford United Church

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(Warmth)

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Mascoma Bank

National Association for the Education

of Young Children (NAEYC)

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New Chapter, Inc.

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Norwich Congregational Church

Norwich Lions Club

Omega Optical

People's United Bank

Periwinkle Foundation

Robert & Lynne Schwartz Fund

Rotary Club of Bellows Falls

Rotary International / The Rotary Fund

Savings Bank of Walpole

Springfield Moose Lodge 679

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St. Michael's Episcopal Church

Taftsville Chapel Mennonite Fellowship

The Fanny Holt Ames and Edna Louise

Holt Fund

The Old South Church Benevolent

Fund

The Patrick Foundation

The Vermont Community Foundation

(VCF)

The Wurster Family Foundation



United Church of Bellows Falls
United Way of Windham County
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Windham Foundation

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Ms. Lorraine Wright

Ways to Donate

On-line donations can be made by clicking on the Donation button at www.sevca.org. You may also mail a check to SEVCA, Attn: Annual Appeal, 91 Buck Drive, Westminster, VT 05156. For further information, please contact Becky Himlin, Director of Planning and Development at 802-722-4575 ext. 163.

Donations are used to:

- Help ensure that local families in crisis can get help to prevent homelessness, keep the heat on, access affordable health insurance, and build personal assets.
- Support our efforts to build people's skills, help them create sustainable livelihoods, and lay a strong foundation for children's educational success.
- Enable us to improve the energy efficiency and habitability of area homes.
- Sustain our thrift stores as a low-cost resource for the basic needs of clothing, furniture, and household goods





91 Buck Drive
Westminster, VT 05158

Our mission is to enable people to cope with, and reduce the hardships of poverty, create sustainable self-sufficiency, and reduce the causes and move toward the elimination of poverty.

Management Team

- Steve Geller, Executive Director
- Harald Schmidtke, Director of Weatherization
- Denise Mason, Director of Economic Development
- Pat Burke, Director of Family Services
- Lori Canfield, Director of Head Start
- Tonia White, Director of Thrift Stores and Textile Recycling
- Dan Foster, Home Repair Coordinator
- Tom Clews, Finance Director
- Becky Himlin, Director of Planning and Development
- Paul LaFreniere, IT Administrator
- Linda Brooks, Executive Assistant

Acknowledgements

Content written by Becky Himlin
Graphic design by Meg Lucas

OFFICE LOCATIONS

Main Office

91 Buck Drive, Westminster, VT 05158
Tel. 802-722-4575
Fax 802-722-4509
Toll Free 800-464-9951

Thrift Stores / Textile Recycling

Bellows Falls	463-9084
Springfield	885-7074
White River Junction (Hartford Ave. Store)	359-4183
(Recycling Center)	295-6373

Outreach Offices

Brattleboro (outreach)	254-2795
Brattleboro (housing)	579-1314
Springfield	885-6153
White River Junction	295-5215
Windsor Satellite	674-2900

Head Start

Chester (GMUHS)	875-3904
Main Office, Springfield	885-6669
Springfield classroom	885-6664
White River Junction (Northwoods)	295-1122
Windsor	674-5690