Advancing Health Equity in Vermont:

Community Success Stories













VERMONT
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

In 2022, the Vermont Department of Health (VDH) was awarded a grant from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) entitled the *National Initiative to Address COVID-19 Health Disparities Among Populations at High-Risk and Underserved, Including Racial and Ethnic Minority Populations and Rural Communities*. One-time funding was made possible through the Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act, 2021, and was expected to fund over 100 state, local, territorial, and freely associated state health departments. This groundbreaking funding represented one of CDC's largest investments to date focused specifically on reducing health disparities related to COVID-19 to address public health issues among marginalized communities.

With these funds, VDH's Office of Health Equity Integration (OHEI) prioritized organizations serving populations who have experienced historical and contemporary injustice and systemic inequities. In partnership with Vermont Community Foundation, over $8 million was awarded to 34 community-based organizations, supporting projects across the state including Addison, Bennington, Caledonia, Chittenden, Franklin, Lamoille, Orleans, Rutland, Washington, Windsor, and Windham counties. For many organizations, this award was an opportunity for communities to feel seen and supported and to build new or enhanced relationships with the Office of Health Equity Integration and the Vermont Department of Health more broadly.

> *"Projects supported through this award included healing spaces for Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC) communities who have experienced systemic oppression, closing the health disparities gap for those in rural areas, enhancing language access for providers and patients, expanding health services for neurodivergent individuals, building programs for LGBTQIA+ communities, and much more."*

Partnerships developed with community organizations have provided an opportunity to recognize the ongoing work and dedication happening every day to address root causes of health inequities. These organizations often fill the gaps in resources not traditionally provided through existing systems. These partnerships continue to remind us that centuries of racism and oppression have led to health disparities. As we look ahead and recognize the shifting landscape of resources, we know we will have to be more creative in how we continue to support the work moving forward.

VDH offers our deepest gratitude to our community partners for the amazing work they do each day, and share our commitment to continuing to learn from, share with, and collaborate in partnership.

Sincerely,



Mark A. Levine, MD
Commissioner, Vermont Department of Health

To the community

As the CEO of the Vermont Community Foundation (VCF), it fills me with immense gratitude to share this report, which details the work of the remarkable organizations that received funding through the Health Equity program, a partnership between the VCF and the Vermont Department of Health.

The COVID-19 pandemic laid bare the stark health disparities that exist within Vermont, particularly among those who have faced socioeconomic disadvantage, historical injustice, and systemic racism. The VCF, alongside our partners, remains committed to ensuring that philanthropy reaches every corner of Vermont, offering opportunities for every Vermonter to thrive.

This report is not just a collection of summaries; it is a narrative of resilience and innovation. Each page tells a story of an organization that stepped up to address inequity in a manner their community needed. We are grateful for the opportunity to support these efforts.

The VCF's work to close the opportunity gap is intrinsically linked to health equity. We believe that every Vermonter deserves the resources and support necessary to lead a healthy and fulfilling life. This project exemplifies the power of collaboration between public and private entities, showcasing our collective experience in deploying grants, convening diverse groups, and elevating the voices of those with lived experiences.

We commend the Health Department for their approach to grantmaking, which included a simplified application process and using community reviewers with lived experience to decide the grantees. These strategies make funding more accessible to a broader spectrum of groups across the state.

Above all, we extend our deepest appreciation to the dedicated organizations whose work has enriched our understanding of how to direct government funding in ways that ensure it reaches those who need it most.

We look forward to continued learning and more opportunities to create a healthier, more equitable Vermont.



Dan Smith



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By the Numbers

107,023

Number of People Served

Full-Time Hires

62

397

New Partners Gained

Dollars Leveraged

$1.5M+

70

Press Mentions

Dental and Medical Appointments Facilitated

3,599

370

Dental Appointments Facilitated

3,229

Medical Appointments Facilitated



86

Consultants Hired

371

Stipends Paid





64

New Funders Identified



2,417

Volunteer Hours

728

Engagements with Community Members





1,772

Social Media Posts



Feel as though they have a stronger organization because of this grant



Know more about the Vermont Community Foundation due to this grant



Know more about the VT Dept of Health due to this grant



Know more about seeking funding



Health Equity Coordinator Lucy Neel and Abenaki Songbird painted a mural at the Green Mountain Transit bus station in Montpelier as a community and educational event.

Abenaki Helping Abenaki

Abenaki Helping Abenaki (AHA) preserves the culture, community awareness, and outreach of the Nulhegan Band of the Coosuk Abenaki Nation. AHA provides educational resources to meet the academic needs of the Nulhegan Band and other Native American students. AHA also supplies community members with healthy food and essentials in times of need. We are committed to educating Nulhegan Band citizens and other Native Americans on traditional agriculture and sustainable living.

How The Grant Was Used

The funding was used to support food security and health and wellness. We invested in a cornmeal distribution pilot project, which improved our food pantry operations. We were able to hire two health equity coordinators. One coordinator's focus was the Nulhegan Tribe. We shared grant funds with the Elnu Tribe, which allowed them to hire a health equity coordinator for their needs in southern Vermont. These two staff members organized and conducted vaccine clinics, health screenings, food preservation classes, and preventive medicine programs that improved citizens' physical and mental health.

Impact

Before this grant, we served 265 households monthly through our food pantry. Since the grant, we've been able to serve more than 700 households monthly, including Native and non-Native Vermonters in rural areas of the state. We've partnered with senior-focused organizations to offer traditional craft workshops that also combat social isolation. The two health equity coordinators have hosted cancer screenings, delivered hundreds of vaccines, and conducted more than 25 events and classes focused on bringing preventative health to the most remote areas of the state.

What's Next?

We look forward to working with funders who want to make an immediate impact on creating and maintaining healthy communities by continuing and expanding our programming. We strive to keep these programs going and to continue to have staff to provide the services.

"The activity of painting the mural at the bus station was a wonderful experience. We were so supported by the community who came out to watch us, participate, and help. It will always be there to remind visitors that we have a continued presence in our homeland. Our Abenaki community can feel proud that we are visible and seen. It really helps mental health and wellness to finally be acknowledged!"

—Mural Participant



Aging in Hartland

Aging in Hartland, a nonprofit organization, is a network of friends and neighbors who connect residents over 60 to support services and resources to help them continue to find meaning and connection as they age in their own homes in a community they love.

"We have really appreciated the support of the visiting nurses coming to our home on a regular basis. And being just downright thoughtful and full of information. Visiting nurses have given back to the older generation of this community and helped tie them together with the younger folks."

—Client

How The Grant Was Used

As a result of this funding, we have been able to offer free tech help sessions following our monthly Senior Café. We hired a professional web developer to redesign our website and add valuable resources. They created a more intuitive interface for seniors and their families. The new website includes a confidential referral form, links to services, and information about our community nurse program.

Impact

People aged 60 and over make up one-third of Hartland's population, and we estimate that more than 70% of these seniors live at or below the poverty line. Demand for our services, such as community nursing, is growing. Our website is a fundamental tool to reach both Hartland seniors and their family members who do not live in town. It is also essential to our fundraising capacity.

What's Next?

We hope to develop an interface between our confidential referral form and our services database. This will cut out a manual step and speed up the process of getting services to our clients. We plan to develop an integrated system to connect volunteers with clients requesting services.



All Brains Belong VT

All Brains Belong VT (ABB) supports the health and belonging of people with all types of brains. We do this through neurodiversity-affirming medical care, social connection, employment support, and community education.

How The Grant Was Used

This grant funded education and training, medical care, and resource coordination. We were able to provide no-cost neuro-inclusion trainings for healthcare providers, educators, and employers. We expanded access to gender affirming hormone therapy for patients whose primary care providers don't provide it, offered community neuro-inclusive vaccine clinics, and piloted a peer mental health support program. We hosted two community health education fairs and created a free online resource guide for patients and primary care providers focused on improving the healthcare of autistic and ADHD adults.

"[ABB] feels more like a community than a medical practice. It's an opportunity to meet others... going through similar things, which makes us feel a lot less alone and a lot more hopeful."

—Sarah K (they/them) ABB Community Advisory Board

Impact

In 2023, we served 339 medical patients whose needs were not served by the traditional healthcare system, an increase of 45% from the year prior. In the last two years, we've grown from a staff of two to six with 67 volunteers. We nearly doubled the number of medical patients we served from 2022 to 2023. We provided education and training to more than 500 community members and practitioners. We created an online resource for medical providers and patients to better understand their intertwined conditions, which has been accessed by 12,000 people.

What's Next?

This grant funded our capacity to create programs that have been funded by the VT Community Foundation and the Organization for Autism Research. With the major growth we experienced in 2022 and 2023, we will spend 2024 making sure we are doing what we set out to do through data and outcomes analysis and an equity audit. With equity at the core of our mission, it's vital we understand and eliminate any barriers to our services.

339
medical patients served in 2023.

500+
education and training provided to more than 500 community members and practitioners.

67
grown from a staff of two to six with 67 volunteers.

Alnôbaiwi

The mission of Alnôbaiwi, which translates to "In the Abenaki Way," is to teach Vermont Abenaki culture and heritage. We are a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization whose members include Intertribal Indigenous citizens, friends, and allies. Our diverse group of members come together to participate in living history, song, dance, gardening, fellowship, and ceremony.

How The Grant Was Used

The grant was used to reduce trauma in the Abenaki community. We provided activities that served to preserve Abenaki heritage and traditions that had been subsumed by Abenaki people hiding their identity to avoid the sterilization of Abenaki women and forced enrollment of children in "Indian Schools." Activities included workshops in Abenaki crafts, the practice of Abenaki Ceremony, the maintenance of an Abenaki garden, and the creation of an Abenaki Library and an Abenaki Exhibition at the Ethan Allen Homestead Museum. The funding allowed us to hire an administrative coordinator.

Impact

The grant's impact was significant. It allowed Alnôbaiwi to actualize its mission of preserving and teaching Abenaki tradition by conducting workshops and financially compensating Abenaki educators and artisans for their instruction. The new administrative coordinator enabled Alnôbaiwi to organize volunteers from the community for events and activities, and to augment and support the efforts of the volunteer council and membership.

What's Next?

Alnôbaiwi is partnering with the Nulheagan and Missisquoi Bands to build longboats in the traditional way by burning out logs. Also, we're convening Abenaki educators to plan a traveling Abenaki exhibition that will go to schools, state parks, and public buildings. We will be conducting ceremonies on our ceremonial grounds at the Ethan Allen Homestead, and offering workshops in traditional cooking, beading, basket making, and drum making.





"Before I joined Alnôbaiwi,
I didn't know my heritage, customs
or who I was. Now I am connected
to the land and to the Spirits.
I used to be ashamed of who I was,
but now I'm proud."

—Alnôbaiwi Council Member and Treasurer

ALNÔBAÍWÍ
Preserving Abenaki Cultural Heritage



BI-STATE PRIMARY CARE ASSOCIATION
SERVING VERMONT & NEW HAMPSHIRE
Improving Access to Primary Health Care Since 1986

Bi-State Primary Care Association

Bi-State is the Primary Care Association that serves New Hampshire and Vermont. We provide training and technical assistance to federally qualified health centers (FQHC) to improve programmatic, clinical, operational, and financial performance. Bi-State's mission is to advance access to comprehensive primary care services for all, with an emphasis on those most in need in Vermont and New Hampshire. Our vision is to create healthy individuals, families, and communities with equitable and quality health care for all.

How The Grant Was Used

Bi-State Primary Care Association launched the Federally Qualified Health Center (FQHC) Justice Equity Diversity and Inclusion (JEDI) training initiative. The funding allowed us to hire three consultants to implement this. We contracted two expert trainers to provide a menu of 30 different virtual and in-person training and executive coaching options for FQHCs. Each center was given the flexibility to choose different training topics and to prioritize their different audiences. Bi-State also hired an anti-oppression activist, speaker, and trainer to provide two virtual trainings. Training topics included culture in the workplace, active bystander training, polarity in the workplace, managing microaggressions, inclusive leadership, and more.

Impact

We served 523 clients and expect that number to surpass 750 clients by May 2024. Vermont's Federally Qualified Health Centers value health equity and have made many strides along that path, but it is not always clear to health center leaders what their next steps should be. We offered executive coaching sessions, in addition to the trainings, to help them identify and prioritize next steps.

What's Next?

Concurrent with the Vermont FQHC JEDI Training Initiative, Bi-State developed and implemented our own JEDI work plan. This work plan includes both inward-looking work such as trainings for Bi-State staff, and outward-facing work, such as trainings and support for VT and NH health centers and public policy priorities.

"The trainer offered an engaging and applicable training that stirred insight for our employees. He offered a 'gracious space' that allowed for vulnerability and honesty. Society has taught us to avoid difficult conversations, but he asked our staff to lean in and engage because that is the path to learning."

—Ashleen Buchanan, Program and Grants Manager, Little Rivers Health Care, Inc.

Come Alive Outside

Our mission at Come Alive Outside (CAO) is to inspire collaborative community systems that create the awareness, intention, and opportunity for people to live healthier lives outside. CAO works closely with partners in healthcare, public health, outdoor recreation, community organizations and value-aligned companies to connect individuals, families, and entire communities to the health and wellness benefits of outdoor spaces where they live, work, and play.

How The Grant Was Used

The funding allowed us to employ four full-time equivalents and significantly boost outdoor equity efforts in Rutland, Vermont. We extended the full-time program manager's role and allocated 25% of the executive director's time, specifically for outdoor equity initiatives. We conducted weekly "outdoors for all" activities facilitated by those who have lived experience with identities that have been historically excluded or disenfranchised from outdoor recreation. Our efforts reached more than 15,000 individuals from priority populations during the grant period. We saw a notable increase in participant retention across our programs and outreach activities.

Impact

This funding enabled us to fully embrace our core values of inclusivity, diversity, and equity in outdoor activities like never before. Through this grant, we collaborated with exceptional individuals and organizations, empowering community-led initiatives for outdoor equity that were previously beyond reach. Together, we've learned, unlearned, made mistakes, pivoted, triumphed, failed, iterated, adjusted, and persevered. This effort has granted us profound insight into the needs and desires of priority populations in outdoor recreation, transforming our organization.

What's Next?

We're thrilled to announce that we are grant recipients of the Vermont Outdoor Recreation Economic Collaborative (VOREC) Outdoor Equity funding for $298,000 until 2025. The data and impact showcased through this grant enabled us to pursue this opportunity. This grant has been instrumental in paving the way for further funding and aligning with our goals and our values.



More than 300 children and families visited Depot Park in Rutland to enjoy lawn games, Adirondack chairs, free lemonade, and giveaways during our Friday night live stay and play station. We gave away tick removers, first-aid kits, sunscreen, and Frisbees. For many, this was the first time they had played in Depot Park, a green space that has been underutilized for recreation by families and individuals, despite its accessibility and proximity to stores and social services. (Photo credit: Arwen Turner/Come Alive Outside)



Come Alive Outside's mascot Bigfoot and a new friend enjoying an imagination camp set-up on the CAO Green Street at the 2023 Whoopie Pie Festival. (Photo credit: Arwen Turner/ Come Alive Outside)



Conscious Homestead

Conscious Homestead is a space where Black and Brown folks can be in the active practice of living the art of liberation. We embody freedom and wholeness through nurturing the land and collective while being in service to our ancestors. We exist because the practices of capitalism have undermined our safety, health, and sovereignty. We exist to care for our immediate needs and create opportunities to build a thriving future, unapologetically centering those who live at the most intersections of oppression.

How The Grant Was Used

The funding allowed us to hire critical operational support, including 2.7 full-time equivalent employees and five consultants. The grant funded our largest program, the Flying Fish Fellowship, an Afro-Indigenous farming program that offers immersive experiences on weekends through the summer for young BIPOC Vermonters. The grant also funded our Flying Fish Fellowship Reunion Retreats, Herbal Care Package Program, Black Rest Retreats, For the People Free Library, and Community Garden Collective.

Impact

2023 was a pivotal year of growth and change for Conscious Homestead. We now deliver 60+ care packages each quarter to Black and Brown folks. In 2023, Conscious Homestead directed more than $78,000 to Black businesses and more than $57,000 to Queer-owned businesses. This key financial and infrastructural support enabled our founder and executive director to shift Conscious Homestead from a solopreneurship that they established in 2016, and solely operated as such until 2022, into a budding organization with a paid staff of five.

What's Next?

Receiving this grant was transformational, allowing us to greatly increase our impact and be a consistent source of support to the members of our community that are most marginalized and forgotten. However, this one-time federal money is expiring we are unable to continue our work at the same level without continued funding from the community.

"For me, Conscious Homestead is home. This organization, run by a few people, can somehow provide food, meals, love, holistic mental and physical wellness, access to urban homesteading, tools to be able to live off the land, a bridge to community resources, and a space for our BIPOC community to commune in a safe and holistic environment."

—Flying Fish Fellowship Participant:

Friends for Change: Interaction Youth-Services

In partnership with Health Care and Rehabilitation Services (HCRS), Interaction-Youth Services supports Friends For Change (FFC), a youth-led, adult-guided, trauma-informed, play-based club in Bellows Falls, Vermont. The FFC Youth Center opened its doors in September 2022 and provides programming for youth who have experienced trauma associated with poverty, discrimination, foster care, and family instability. Our goal is to transform trauma and shape dreams. Power is shared, and club members have ownership over decision making, leading community events, and coordinating youth-led play and field trips.

How The Grant Was Used

FFC youth and young adults were involved in every aspect of designing our new space. Staff helped community partners host events centered around the voices of underrepresented youth. Our participants successfully advocated for the development of a community-based youth center. We were able to provide stipends for youth-led projects, which left youth feeling capable, valued, and respected. We created a paid internship for one youth who had dropped out of school due to systemic racism. Their internship was centered around their passion, and they are now employed at a local business.

Impact

As a result of the funding, our middle school program has doubled in size. Ninety percent of our participants are historically marginalized youth. The funding also provided more resources for us to write a grant which resulted in hiring another staff member with lived experience. Our youth and young adult voices were so convincing, their dream is now written into the Bellows Falls town plan. Youth and their families used gas and phone cards to attend events and medical appointments, receive therapy and housing services, visit food pantries, and secure jobs.

What's Next?

We hope to receive funding for a multiyear grant that will allow us to continue our efforts to develop a community center to permanently house FFC. We are in the process of developing a Vermont Suicide Prevention Strategic Plan guided by the voices and visions of 16 historically marginalized youth and young adults. We have secured funding to increase staff and sustain the middle school program.

Friends for Change: Youth Center

Inspiration ✦ Community ✦ Empowerment

A program of Youth Service in partnership with Health Care and Rehabilitation Services

19 Henry Street, Bellows Falls, Vermont









"I got so much happiness and experience from this project. I built shelves, stools, and a firepit outside. It taught me so much and helped me escape my other life into something I love dearly."

—Youth Leader, age 16



Inner Space

Inner Space is a community organization for people who have experienced systemic oppression and all those furthest from justice. We take an interdisciplinary team approach to client treatment by bringing allopathic, ancestral, and communal medicine together under one roof. We focus on community care, including wellness and mental health in schools, and have aligned with incredible community partners who have a shared vision.

"I like how we do yoga and it's calming

—Ankita, age 12

"It makes us forget about our stuff, gives us a clear mind when we're doing it."

—Nirjara, age 14

How The Grant Was Used

The grant funded community wellness festivals and capacity building. Our advisory board helped us build our vision. The grant allowed us to hire 10 consultants. We sought community members to collaborate with, including Outright Vermont who was instrumental in our wellness festivals. We have also connected with The Unheard Stories Project in Winooski. Together, we've used the funds to have direct impact in schools through community building, school-based wellness, and yoga in the classroom with our partner Black Bamboo Wellbeing.

Impact

We have learned our school communities are hungry for more school-based wellness, including yoga and meditation sessions. This work cultivates a calm mind and heart in a community that is heavily stressed, dealing with systemic oppression, and needing a safe space that is led by people with lived experience. Even the teachers are asking for more.

What's Next?

The impact has been incredible, and we are now looking for additional funding to grow this work in Winooski and other school districts. We want to offer yoga teacher trainings to BIPOC teachers and older students. Currently, we have no additional funding and are actively brainstorming how to continue this work.

"The yoga and meditation is very calming and puts you in a better place. It helped with my basketball injury and helps put you in a better mood"

—Jay, age 12

Maquam Bay of Missisquoi



We work to promote and sustain a strong, healthy, and united community for the members of the Abenaki Nation by strengthening community through cultural preservation. Seventy-five percent of the people we serve are Native American. The governing body of the Abenaki Nation of Missisquoi is dedicated to four guiding principles: strengthening cultural connection, protecting land and traditions, providing health and wellness programs, and promoting Indigenous and settler partnerships. We're committed to working tirelessly alongside our community members to ensure a prosperous and vibrant future for the Abenaki Nation of Missisquoi.

How The Grant Was Used

The grant allowed us to hire three part-time positions or 2.5 full-time equivalents, who included an office manager, a Tribal assistant, and a bookkeeper. The office manager has applied for more grants. Our Tribal assistant provided phone coverage, and her technological skills exponentially benefitted our office. We created a striking new website to promote our mission. The funding not only staffed our office, but it also covered our office expenses. We were able to purchase computers, a scanner/printer, and a new shredder.

Impact

The impact has been huge for our community, and we were able to serve 10,000 people. The Tribal office had a tremendous flow of traffic daily from folks accessing our food pantry and other services we provide. Our food pantry is the heart of our organization. In 2023, we fed 6,700 clients, including 1,885 families. This number tripled from past years. The staff was able to keep the doors open and meet the daily needs of our Tribal members and our community. We offered 50 health and wellness fairs, workshops, and clinics in our Tribal office. We also increased public awareness through 300 social media posts and 20 mentions in the press.

What's Next?

We will continue to apply for grants to keep our doors open and allow us to provide services to those in need. One of the greatest benefits from this grant was the ability to network, partner, and collaborate with a support team.

3

Part-time positions added

10,000

People served

6,700

Clients fed in 2023

50

Health and wellness fairs, workshops, and clinics offered

"I believe that the food pantry is the heart of our organization."

—Debbie Lavoie, Food Pantry Manager



Open Door Clinic

The Open Door Clinic provides access to free, quality healthcare services to those who are uninsured or underinsured in a compassionate, respectful, and culturally sensitive manner until a permanent healthcare provider can be established. We serve Addison County, Vermont, and see patients by appointment.

"I believe that the wellness program is crucial to the wellbeing of our patients who live remotely in the countryside of Addison County, far from their country of origin, families, and support system. The program can help build a greater sense of community, self-esteem, belonging, and ultimately happiness, to those who have sacrificed and left so much behind to be here."

—Alysse Anton,
Wellness Coordinator for Open Door Clinic

How The Grant Was Used

The funding supported the retrofitting of our new sprinter van that we were able to purchase in December 2022, through a special donor gift and community fundraising. Having an exam van has been a game changer. It has helped to reduce barriers by providing medical care at a time and place when workers are available. It has cut down on delaying care that could exacerbate acute problems or chronic conditions. The funding also made it possible for us to launch our wellness program and facilitate support groups. We were able to coordinate wellness activities with the intention of creating a sense of connection and belonging between our patients and the environment they are living in.

Impact

Our exam van has transformed our practice and increased the capacity of what we can accomplish and provide in the field. Being able to immediately address patient healthcare needs, beyond administering vaccines and providing patient education, underscores the effectiveness and efficiency of having a warm, dry, comfortable, and confidential space available to see patients when on the farm or orchard.

What's Next?

We will welcome a Spanish-speaking, second-year MSW intern in August and look forward to expanding our capacity to better serve our patients through her presence and skills!

ODC OPEN DOOR CLINIC
Increasing Access to Healthcare



Orleans County Restorative Justice Center

The Orleans County Restorative Justice Center (OCRJC) is a nonprofit community justice agency that provides a full continuum of restorative justice programming and services. Our work begins with prevention and intervention in the schools and continues through to restorative reentry, supporting people returning to the community from incarceration. Our mission is to **create** opportunities for individuals to take responsibility for their actions and help them reenter their community, **strengthen** communities, and **empower** individuals to take an active role in their community.

How The Grant Was Used

We used the funding to create a monthly newsletter highlighting and educating Orleans and Northern Essex Counties on restorative justice issues and practices in the community. The newsletters are published on our website, sent out electronically, and printed for distribution in public spaces. The funding allowed us to conduct a survey about community perceptions on safety and restorative justice. We used that data to understand how safety was perceived in the community and reevaluated our messaging to better communicate our principles.

Impact

The newsletters and website have served to educate the community and promote the principles of restorative and social justice. Our staff and board are excited to build upon that feeling of connection by encouraging community volunteerism.

What's Next?

We will encourage community groups to use our survey findings to build better safety and capacity. We want to host regular forums for more discussion. This funding has supercharged our connection to our community, and we are seeking additional funding to facilitate community circles and to continue our monthly newsletters.

"Due to the newsletters, I now know about Orleans County Restorative Justice Center and understand what they do. Their small staff is super committed to making our community a better place to live. I appreciate being asked about what I can do to support our community."

—Longtime community member



We have asked folks the question, "What does health justice mean to you?"

- Allowing for diverse, culturally competent metrics of health
- Understanding health as holistic and comprised of many interconnected axes
- Access to healthy foods and healthy places to live
- Free healthcare, education, and housing
- Being rural shouldn't determine whether we have access to culturally competent care.
- Accessible and affordable
- Autonomy and self-determination—trusting people to know what they need.
- Resisting oppression in systems of mental, physical, spiritual, emotional, and environmental health acknowledging healthism and saneism, which is systemic discrimination against people perceived to have a mental disorder or cognitive impairment.

"Being rural shouldn't determine whether we have access to culturally competent care."

—Out in the Open Community Member

Out in the Open

Out in the Open is a multiracial, mostly working class, grassroots movement and capacity-building organization whose mission is to connect rural LGBTQ+ people to build community, visibility, knowledge, and power. We work throughout Wabanaki territory, primarily in the rural areas of the states of Vermont and Maine.

How The Grant Was Used

We used the funding to launch the HEART program (Health Equity and Access for Rural TLGBQ+ people). This program serves rural TLGBQ+ people in northern and southern Vermont. Participants request support with healthcare-related needs, and volunteers then respond to fulfill these requests. We distributed COVID-19 test kits and masks statewide. The funding allowed us to hire two full-time equivalents. It also helped us continue to host a virtual peer support and needs assessment space that meets online every month and tackles health justice projects.

Impact

The HEART program has been vital in getting people better access to healthcare and making healthcare experiences safer for rural TLGBQ+ people. We have provided a safer landing place for existing community members and those who are considering moving to Vermont and want to assess the healthcare landscape prior to moving. This programming has provided meaningful support for marginalized communities who may not otherwise have access to resources.

What's Next?

We are pausing the HEART program to internally evaluate it and decide how we should continue serving the community. During the grant period, we submitted a proposal to collaborate with Brattleboro Memorial Hospital staff to create a dedicated LGBTQ+ clinic to significantly improve both equity and access while also easing the burden on our small organization.



Outright Vermont

Since 1989, Outright Vermont has been the only statewide organization serving LGBTQ+ youth. Our Burlington building is a central hub where all LGBTQ+ youth have hope, equity, and power. We focus on three points of impact: discovering self and supporting peer connections, strengthening families, and transforming schools, communities, and systems. Our decades of experience developing deeply woven and impactful youth programming supports the individual and the family and creates systems-level change. Our organization is committed to intersectionality and anti-racism in all that we do.

How The Grant Was Used

When we applied for the grant, we had expanded our programming staff to respond to statewide LGBTQ+ youth needs, but our administrative staff was stretched thin. The grant allowed us to add 1.5 full-time equivalent staff to support our fundraising and administrative work, and we initiated our new strategic plan to carry us into 2027. We also developed an online training program and hired an Education Manager to radically shift how we work with professionals in schools and other systems.

Impact

Our new online learning modules allow us to level-set knowledge with our training partners before we ever step into a classroom with them. This has enhanced our relationship with schools. Our communications team has transformed our online presence through social media, a new website, and consistent messaging, allowing for better access to resources and programming. We've created a toolkit for families and caregivers of LGBTQ+ youth. This gives LGBTQ+ youth the platforms to lead the change they want in their communities and connects them to a network of peers and supportive adults.

What's Next?

Our increased fundraising staff is helping to grow our team size to 16 by the end of the year with new roles on the horizon in 2025. We will close on a former Boy Scout camp in Rutland County in May and bring to fruition our long-held dream of acquiring a retreat space for our summer camp programs and more. We are completing our new strategic plan, which will be our steadfast guide to helping us evaluate our impact. We're upholding the balance between program and administrative roles so that every step of growth is sustainable.

> "Suicide is no longer an option. I want to live for moments like this."
>
> *—Youth Program Participant*



Pride Center of Vermont

Pride Center of Vermont is dedicated to advancing community and the health and safety of Two Spirit, Transgender, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Queer+ (2STLGBQ+) Vermonters. We serve Vermonters of all ages and are based in downtown Burlington. Our mission is to celebrate, educate, and advocate with and for 2STLGBQ+ Vermonters.

1.35
Full-time equivalent hires

129
Events conducted

14
Health care trainings provided in 2023

18,094
2STLGBQ+ people served

How The Grant Was Used

We added 1.35 full-time equivalent hires, shared across five workers, to our Trans Program and our Thrive QTPOC program, which serves Queer and Trans People of Color. We conducted 129 events, including organizing and hosting a health summit for 175 people in Randolph, Vermont, for 2STLGBQ+ people in collaboration with Out in the Open and Outright Vermont. We provided 14 health care trainings during 2023 to more than 600 people and increased the number of providers listed on our safer and affirming database. We hired seven consultants to help us grow our intersectional culture at Pride Center.

Impact

We served a total of 18,094 2STLGBQ+ people, including 1,693 People of Color and 4,436 Transgender and NonBinary people. Our Queer and Trans People of Color program, Thrive, was able to get out into the community more, connecting with Queer and Trans People of Color individuals and leaders. The collaborations between our Thrive QTPOC and Trans Programs have created more opportunities for intersectional identity spaces.

What's Next?

We want to continue coordinating larger scale events in collaboration with other BIPOC-focused organizations and the Pride Center's Trans and Thrive programs. We currently have a mutual aid program that allows QTPOC Vermonters to request funding for basic needs, and we are currently seeking ways to offer similar funding to Transgender, Gender-NonConforming and NonBinary Vermonters too.

190 people attended our Thrive Ball. The most heard comment was,

"We needed this."

Our Barn Party at Intervale Center in Burlington was our highest attended summer event with 25 Queer and Trans People of Color from across the state.



Social Tinkering: A Human Connection Project

Social Tinkering's mission is to build thriving communities by empowering connections and growing happiness. We work to strengthen the social fabric of communities by helping people build meaningful connections through experiences, learning together, and collective actions, growing cultures grounded in compassionate belonging.

How The Grant Was Used

Our funding was used to create a statewide social isolation and loneliness coalition, called The Vermont Thriving Communities Coalition. In 2023, we worked with equity and development consultants throughout the state to define future work of the coalition centered on advocacy, collaboration, resource development, and revenue development. We envision a Vermont where ALL people have opportunities to feel safe and connected and to experience compassionate belonging. Our purpose is to offer equitable and sustainable resources, knowledge, and experiences throughout Vermont, to prevent and heal chronic loneliness.

Impact

The Vermont Thriving Communities Coalition builds connections between people and groups across Vermont who are working to grow cultures of compassion and belonging. This coalition implements innovative social change work, builds a supportive network, and creates an avenue to easily share information and resources to strengthen and increase our collective impact. Social Tinkering's impact then creates a space for people to experience and grow meaningful connections, to learn together, and to coordinate actions that remove barriers to connection, ultimately growing a culture of well-being and compassionate belonging.

What's Next?

Our planning team has recommended that we begin early implementation of the statewide coalition by strengthening our local Rutland Belonging Collective to solidify best practices and then expanding outward to encompass the entire state. The funding is continuing to support our staff and our projects. In addition, this funding supports a development consultant who is working to secure future funding for the Coalition.

"I REALLY appreciated the Vermont-wide relationships fostered in this space with people that have similar mindsets and different skills."

—Planning Team Member



Single mom and young daughter
(Photo credit: Sarah Livingstone, Sunrise Grants & Communication Specialist)

"I'm more grateful that you can know. This saved my family."

—Program Participant

"Families on the Move made it so I am able to have less stress and more freedom. I can now work and be able to bring my children places in a safe car."

—Program Participant

Sunrise Family Resource Center

Sunrise is Bennington County's parent child center. Our mission is to strengthen families by providing support and services. Our services promote the growth and development of individuals and families through encouragement of strengths, expansion of opportunities, and support in times of stress. Our vision is that ALL families have the strengths and resources to reach their full potential.

How The Grant Was Used

The funding allowed us to fill a gap in services by launching a pilot program called Families on the Move. This program supports individuals and families on their paths to realizing transportation independence. We used the funds to hire a transportation coordinator, and to assist our clients in attaining driver's education, permits, licenses, car registrations, inspections, insurance, gas cards, repairs, and maintenance. We also partnered with the local bus company to start a Family Support Shuttle that travels to and from local grocery stores, laundromats, and food shelves.

Impact

We've had a tremendous impact on the community. Our Family Support Shuttle provides twice weekly service. Our Families on the Move team is busy processing applications and carrying out activities. Our transportation coordinator works closely with individuals and families applying for assistance. We also used the funding to support education and training, which has included vehicle repairs, oil changes, new batteries, and tires.

What's Next?

We are working with the Vermont Women's Fund to help transition young women into car ownership by connecting them with used cars. We are looking for more funding for our Families on the Move program so that we can continue filling this gap. We look forward to working with funders who want to make an immediate impact assisting families to increase their self-sufficiency. To keep these programs going, and to continue to have staff to provide the services, we need continued support.

"Without this grant, I would probably be without a car and with a daughter in crisis! Imagining that makes me think I'd have to move too… thank you for this."

—Families on the Move Participant

SUSU commUNITY Farm

SUSU commUNITY Farm is an Afro-Indigenous farm rooted in the Black womanist beliefs of our collective ancestors. We are committed to existing as a homemade field of love for people of the global majority to gather, heal, and thrive in safety, dignity, and belonging. We do this by practicing food and land sovereignty, offering land-based connections, and embodying ancestral healing.

How The Grant Was Used

The grant was used to build our organizational structure and increase our capacity to run programming. We added six full-time equivalent staff members. The funding allowed us to create a comprehensive strategic plan that reflects our mission and vision, update our employee handbook, create a financial manual, establish a budgeting process that aligns with our values, and invest in professional development for both our leadership team and our supporting staff.

Impact

We began building a strong foundation that will continue to reflect our grassroots values while growing at a sustainable rate. By enhancing financial management, optimizing HR practices, and developing a strategic plan and budgetary process, our team has gained invaluable expertise and guidance. This investment has strengthened our internal operations and leadership capabilities, providing a much-needed opportunity for growth that is often difficult for BIPOC organizations to access. Overall, the impact extends beyond the organization, as we are better equipped to ensure sustainable growth and equitable access to resources and opportunities for our community as well.

What's Next?

In 2023, we purchased our 37-acre farm from The Vermont Land Trust. We are entering our fourth farming season and our fifth year running community programming. With the skills we have gained through this funding, we have increased our operations at a manageable, sustainable pace that continues to meet the growing needs of our community.

SUSU comm UNITY farm



Co-directors Amber Arnold and Naomi Deyoe (Photo credit: Juan Carlos Gonzalez)

"SUSU widened my lens for understanding food not just as nutrition, but as medicine... a medicine that can heal me and a hurting world. Each week, I had the opportunity to come into the land of the elders, and I was given the gift of sitting and learning from those whose hands had tended the food because they cared about tending to me. In turn, I shared the food and the lessons with my family and friends each week... We were blessed by their generosity, love, and wisdom sharing."

—Quote from a member of our free BIPOC CSA program



Story Time at The Janet S. Munt Family Room. (Photo credit: Marion Pope)

The Janet S. Munt Family Room

The Janet S. Munt Family Room is a unique parent child center providing programs that are accessible to all. We help build healthy, connected communities by supporting families and young children. Sixty countries of origin are represented by our families and 40 languages are spoken. More than 50% of our families are at or below the federal poverty level, including New Americans, immigrants, refugees, or BIPOC. Many families have experienced adverse childhood experiences, putting them at higher risk.

How The Grant Was Used

The funding allowed us to hire a human resources coordinator, an administrative assistant, and a director of development, which amounted to two full-time equivalents. This increased our capacity to achieve our mission and gave us the support we needed to complete our 2023-2028 strategic planning. The funding also allowed us to hire a coaching consultant.

Impact

The additional staff has been instrumental in strengthening our infrastructure to continue meeting the needs of our families and community. The consultant helped us develop a supervision framework, leadership overview, and organizational chart. These processes and documents have supported staff better in their roles, in supervision and evaluations, ultimately helping us to better serve families. In 2023, we served 1,597 caregivers and children in 24 programs. We served 22,412 meals during programs and sent home 1,000 meals with families. We distributed 31,242 pounds of food to families, conducted over 700 home visits, and collaborated with 50 organizations.

What's Next?

Over the next few years, we will work toward the seven goals identified in our new five-year strategic plan, which is published on our website. With the help of our director of development and our HR coordinator, we plan to apply for more grants, cultivate new donors, strengthen current stewardship, and improve our data management.

"The Family Room has made an incredibly positive experience on my life (and the life of my partner and child). I was dealing with severe postpartum anxiety, insomnia and depression and coming to the Family Room turned my life around. I am grateful for their support and their non-judgmental, welcoming, and positive environment."

—Parent

THE JANET S. MUNT Family Room Parent-Child Center

The Root Social Justice Center

The Root Social Justice Center (the Root) is a BIPOC, woman-identified, and majority queer-led racial justice organization centering Blackness for almost a decade. Our six programs provide healing space, leadership development, and community for BIPOC in Brattleboro and the surrounding area. Our board is BIPOC-led, with youth board members serving as equal decision making partners. We prioritize BIPOC and their communities by shifting resources to BIPOC for leadership, connection, healing, education, and the arts and support BIPOC-led racial justice movement work.

How The Grant Was Used

The grant was used to support health insurance for full-time staff members and create a staff wellness fund. We distributed $12,000 to 24 individuals through our Mutual Aid Support Network (MASN) to help cover items like rent, car repairs, childcare, and medical bills. We also allocated funds for future MASN distribution. We expanded our Healing Series programming, which includes monthly events, affinity spaces, and meeting community-identified needs to create a sense of belonging.

Impact

The funding has allowed us to build our internal capacity by offering health benefits to staff in addition to a $1,000 wellness fund. Externally, we have made an enormous impact. From our expungement clinics to our upcoming immigrant group work, we remain THE trusted location for folks in Brattleboro. Our BIPOC Hair Clinic, a one-day event hosted through our Healing Series, drew more than 100 people. Our presence brings folks together, creates opportunities, and helps catalyze local and statewide change and action.

What's Next?

We will utilize the remaining funds to host additional Healing Series events, including more BIPOC Hair Clinics! We will continue providing health insurance for staff members, distribute additional funds through MASN, and host the first ever Root healing and staff retreat for our team. We look forward to working with additional funders to expand and support our programming.



"Collaborating with the Root on the BIPOC financial healing series motivated me to launch my business, Cultivemos Alegria, and dream of possibilities to continue to provide programming for the BIPOC community."

—Ana Mejia,
BIPOC Centered Homebuyers Group Coordinator

The Root
SOCIAL JUSTICE CENTER



United Way of Lamoille County

United Way of Lamoille County fosters community assets to advance the common good of Lamoille County. We cultivate collective action to address complex challenges in our community, link community partners with resources and assets, mobilize resources for and in partnership with our community, and advocate for equitable access to resources for all community members.

> "One client who was impacted by the flood told me he appreciated my advocacy for him—what he called 'dealing with the B.S.' Another flood-impacted client affectionately told me, 'you're a bulldog.'"
>
> *—Jessica, Mobile Rural Resource Navigator*

How The Grant Was Used

The funding supported a pilot program called Mobile Rural Resource Navigation. We hired a full-time mobile rural resource navigator (MRRN) who is available to help community members gain better access to resources and information. This person helps clients access local and state services related to health, housing, transportation, food, heating and utilities bills, essential needs like clothing and home goods, employment, education, and financial and tax assistance. They are also a certified health assister and can help clients to navigate the Vermont Health Connect system.

Impact

Our MRRN has helped more than 900 people connect to more than 120 unique organizations in just over a year. This grant allowed us to hire a skilled and motivated individual to support people in accessing systems that are often confusing to navigate. This vital work reduces barriers. The MRRN was also critical during the catastrophic flooding in July 2023 and the ongoing recovery, which hit our community particularly hard. This grant helped us serve more than 100 flood victims.

What's Next?

We hope to permanently keep the MRRN position in our organization and are currently searching for future funding to support this position. Our local long term recovery group has committed to temporarily funding the position for two to three months after this current grant ends to allow the MRRN to continue supporting flood victims.

United Way of Lamoille County



(Photo credit: Anete Luisina)

United Way of Windham County

United Way of Windham County (UWWC) strives to improve lives by mobilizing the caring power of community. We work with a variety of community partners, including businesses, human service providers, and individuals to meet community needs.

How The Grant Was Used

In 2021, Vermont was earmarked to receive refugees through the resettlement program. About 100 Afghan refugees settled in the Brattleboro area and faced many difficulties settling in a foreign country. The funding was used to provide dental services to refugee and asylum-seeking community groups in Windham County.
The grant was also used to build capacity to support the Charitable Dental Care Program, which included one part-time and one full-time staff member. In addition, the funding supported staff participation in key health equity community workgroups and networking conferences.

Impact

We found that dental needs in this community were extreme. In fact, most potential clients we surveyed were currently experiencing dental pain and reported their dental health needs as urgent. Many of the clients also reported that they had never seen a dentist before. We had 104 individuals sign up for services through our program, and we have provided 76 of these individuals with logistical and financial support. We have facilitated more than 300 dental appointments and continue to receive more intake forms for this program.

What's Next?

We recently received additional funds from Vermont Department of Health because our program has been so successful. This will allow us to get closer to our goal of serving 100% of our clients. The project's success helped us secure two private donations and additional funding from Brattleboro Memorial Hospital. We are diligently working to secure more funding to sustain this program as we expect about 150 more refugees in the Brattleboro community this year.

"Coming from a war-torn country, the greatest blessing was simply being alive. When we arrived here, every aspect of our new life brought its own challenges, especially regarding our health. The dental grant you provided not only addressed a crucial aspect of our well-being, but also alleviated a significant source of pain and discomfort. Your generosity not only improved our oral health but also contributed to our overall sense of well-being and adjustment to life in a new country." —Windam County Resident

104
Individuals signed up for dental services

76
People provided logistical and financial support

300+
Dental appointments facilitated





"Before receiving the grant, our financial systems were outdated and inefficient. Emergency assistance checks are now disbursed faster, making a tangible difference in our community's lives. Overall, the grant has profoundly impacted our ability to respond to community needs."

—Theresa Vezina, Executive Director

Vermont CARES Doin' it Safer

Vermont CARES

Vermont CARES provides lifesaving harm reduction services, education, and resources to Vermonters affected by HIV, Hepatitis C, and substance use by increasing access to care, reducing social stigmas, and building relationships. Our vision is to Celebrate every small change, Accept people where they are at, Respect individual choice and welcome diversity, Envision compassionate communities, and Stand up for the rights of those we serve.

How The Grant Was Used

This grant served to enhance our organizational capacity, systems, and financial competency. We partnered with expert consultants to revamp our financial accounting systems, both internally and within QuickBooks. Additionally, we established a part-time bookkeeping position funded by the grant. The grant provided invaluable training opportunities for the new bookkeeper, our board, and executive director. Furthermore, we utilized the funding to support the implementation of grant management software and conducted a comprehensive assessment of our financial sustainability, donor management, fundraising efforts, gift giving programs, and unrestricted funding needs.

Impact

New financial systems, processes, and staff training have greatly improved our efficiency, allowing our executive director to focus on essential activities during challenging times. This flexibility ensures uninterrupted service to our community, as the director was able to step in to cover vacant positions when needed. Additionally, a consultant's examination of our donor database and fundraising efforts has highlighted areas for growth, guiding our long-term sustainability efforts.

What's Next?

We plan to go live with the new grant management software. This pivotal tool will aid in managing awarded grants, pursuing new opportunities, and completing audits. Additionally, we secured a grant with National Alliance of State and Territorial AIDS Directors (NASTAD) to strengthen harm reduction programs. The project's success has positioned us well to secure more funding opportunities and advance our mission.

Vermont Cultural Brokering Program

The Vermont Cultural Brokering Program provides integrated prevention education and care management to Vermont's former refugee and immigrant communities to improve health equity in those communities. Our goal is to raise awareness around mental health and substance abuse treatment, connect community members to services, and implement universal screening models that can reduce stigma. Six cultural brokers from the Somali, Somali Bantu, Congolese, Nepali, Bhutanese, and Arabic speaking communities provide effective liaisons with schools, social services, clinics, community agencies, medical providers, and mental health agencies. This has helped reduce suicidal ideation and risk in some.

How The Grant Was Used

The funding allowed us to recruit participants and hold focus groups with more than 90 community members across five communities. Each focus group had a cultural broker and/or interpreter present to provide interpretation services. During the focus groups, we covered topics centered around language accessibility. The funding also helped us support 754 community members with housing, employment, health related, school, and benefits issues. We made 361 referrals to agencies and organizations. Our team reached out to 887 community members and provided education around COVID and long COVID.

Impact

A complete report from our focus group findings was submitted to the Vermont Department of Health. The results from 5000 screenings and stories gave insight into the culturally responsive approaches and practices that should be considered when working with former refugee and immigrant populations. We learned from interviewing community members who speak a language other than English as a first language that they preferred in-person interpretation services over electronic options. Many advocated for more choice in their interpreter and some people were concerned with confidentiality while using interpretation services. Many said they wanted an interpreter who they knew was well trained in areas such as HIPAA.

What's Next?

The Vermont Cultural Brokering Program has had significant success, and we hope to continue it at the level it has been operating. We are aggressively seeking funding to continue serving our neighbors. Our services are keeping our neighbors healthy and reducing health disparities in Vermont. "It is crucial that this program, that supports some of our most vulnerable populations in the state, continues."

"The team has been helping thousands of community members along the years, empowering them to share their stories and finding ways to address concerns that are impacting their respective communities. We have organized dozens of community education and outreach sessions on topics related to mental health promotion, substance use prevention, youth development, juvenile law, COVID-19 vaccines, Narcan administration, language accessibility, and housing resources, among other topics. Cultural brokers are a best practice model for serving culturally and linguistically diverse communities."

—The Cultural Brokering Team

754

Community members supported with housing, employment, health related, school, and benefits issues

887

Community members provided education about COVID and long COVID





Vermont Developmental Disabilities Council

The Vermont Developmental Disabilities Council's mission is to help build the connection and support that brings people with developmental disabilities and their families into the heart of Vermont communities. The mission of the Inclusive Healthcare Partnership Project (IHPP) is to build better health for people with developmental disabilities through partnerships and plain language.

"Plain language is very important because, otherwise, we as self-advocates, as a person with a disability, get too much information and that is too much for us. It is crucial that we have information that is accessible."

—Jenny Rainville, IHPP Self-Advocate Coordinator

How The Grant Was Used

The funding allowed us to hire 10 consultants and 0.75 full-time equivalents. The IHPP has two threads, both aimed at improving communication between healthcare providers and people with intellectual or developmental disability. First, IHPP is developing a library of health information designed by and for people with developmental disabilities. Second, IHPP has created provider training materials that explain how to support more meaningful and respectful engagement with neurodiverse patients.

Impact

To ensure meaningful provider-patient interactions and treatment adherence, people with intellectual or developmental disability— along with other disability groups, non-English speakers, and individuals who do not read— need access to health information that they can understand. IHPP has developed a unique and rigorous approach to developing plain language health information. Before materials are finalized, they must be workshopped with at least three focus groups of self-advocates who have developmental disabilities, as well as undergoing review by a team of clinical experts. IHPP uses the techniques of graphic medicine to ensure that visual illustrations reinforce public health messaging. No similar resource exists in the United States. We estimate conservatively that we have reached 1,426 Vermonters with intellectual or developmental disabilities.

What's Next?

IHPP will continue building its library of plain language health information. We plan to create plain language booklets that cover advanced directives, medication safety, the meaning of vital signs, long COVID, and a cartoon story about advocating for oneself during a primary care visit. We have begun the process of translating our plain language materials into eight other languages. Our long-term goal is to share this unique library of resources to self-advocates nationwide through the Developmental Disabilities Council's national network.

Inclusive Healthcare Partnership Project

Vermont Language Justice Project

The Vermont Language Justice Project (VLJP) gives people with language access needs the ability to make informed decisions about their health and their family's health. We do this by creating public service videos and audio files in 19 languages that are spoken here in Vermont. This media is co-produced with trusted community members from Vermont's refugee, migrant, and immigrant communities. These messages are shared widely on YouTube, on WhatsApp, and with over 100 community partners.

How The Grant Was Used

The grant was used to build an infrastructure so that videos could be researched, produced, and disseminated throughout the community of folks with language access needs in Vermont. The funding allowed VLJP to hire three full-time employees and to answer needs in the community during the pandemic and beyond. We responded to health crises, including COVID-19 and human monkeypox, as well as natural disasters like flooding, extreme cold weather, and lake pollutants.

Impact

VLJP has produced over 2,050 videos with over 250,000 views on YouTube, and now boasts 1,600 subscribers. We recently collaborated with the Vermont Department of Mental Health to produce five videos focused on mental health in the refugee community, which have been viewed over 4000 times. We work in up to 19 languages spoken here in Vermont. Our videos are viewed worldwide. We have become a leader in language access and equity for refugees and migrants, providing an essential service that is absent in the rest of the country. As a result, service providers, government agencies, and nonprofits around the country are sharing and using the project's videos to increase access to critical health, social service, and life skills information.

What's Next?

When funding ends, we will face new challenges to continue the project. The feedback from refugee and immigrant communities, as well as the agencies that serve them, is clear: VLJP's work is critical. The project is exploring new funding options, developing a mobile app, preparing to launch a major fundraising effort, and advocating for state agencies to match their stated commitment to equity and language access with consistent, reliable funding.



VLJP's ever-expanding team

"I just think that when people hear their mother tongue first, it's so grounding. It makes them feel like … 'I'm part of this culture, of this community, too. That I matter, that someone is paying attention to what I'm going through.'"

—KeruBo, local Kenyan American singer-songwriter who was among those involved in the earliest stages of VLJP

Vermont Language Justice Project



Vermont Psychiatric Survivors, Inc.

Vermont Psychiatric Survivors, Inc. is an independent, statewide, peer support, and civil rights advocacy organization run by and for psychiatric survivors. Founded in 1983, we offer mutual support, publish a triannual newspaper that is distributed throughout Vermont, offer patient representation in Vermont psychiatric hospitals and residential facilities, sponsor peer-led support groups, advocate and educate to challenge discrimination, and offer technical assistance to allied organizations.

"Life saving, dignity saving, wonderful advocates, great newspaper, and the best peer support group!!"

—Client, Vermont Psychiatric Survivors, Inc.

How The Grant Was Used

The funding allowed us to hire one full-time employee to work as a peer advocate. This employee has been committed to making contacts, working with agencies within the community, adding support clients, and working with peer support advocates one-on-one. The funding also enabled us to send this employee to training events and community liaison events.

Impact

We were able to serve 33 clients because of this funding, which was an increase from years prior. The full-time employee that this grant supported has been in the field working diligently to extend our services and strengthen our presence into the St. Albans area.

What's Next?

Expanding our presence into the St. Albans area has opened amazing opportunities for our organization in that community. We plan to continue adding to our support in St. Albans.

Vermont Racial Justice Alliance



The Vermont Racial Justice Alliance's (VRJA) mission is to secure sustainable power, ensure agency, and provide security for American Descendants of Slavery, while embracing their history and preserving their culture. Through platforms and initiatives, outreach and education, community engagement and support, and cultural empowerment, we are mitigating the direct impact and dismantling the root (systemic) origins of racism in Vermont.

How The Grant Was Used

The grant was used to support initiatives and community outreach around the Richard Kemp Center in Burlington, which included cultural empowerment events, technical assistance, consultation, and data collection efforts aimed at addressing systemic racism and its impacts on the health of BIPOC community members.

Impact

The funding allowed VRJA to provide crucial support, resources, and advocacy to marginalized communities by fostering community engagement, promoting wellness, and advancing racial equity initiatives and legislation. We established ongoing Wellness Working Groups focused on Black and Brown folks that served as a source of healing for hundreds of American Descendants of Slavery and BIPOC community members. We also conducted an education campaign that more than 200 community leaders and residents have participated in. This campaign allows businesses, agencies, municipalities, and organizations to take actionable and measurable initiatives to act on the Governor's declaration that "racism is a public health emergency."

What's Next?

We will continue our efforts to address systemic racism, promote racial equity, and support marginalized communities. The grant has helped us build capacity and structure, which has given our program a wider reach. We are aggressively seeking sustainable funding sources to sustain and expand our deep and growing presence throughout Vermont.

> "We will fight for wellness as if our lives depend upon it— because they do."
>
> *—Mark Hughes, Executive Director*

vermont racial justice alliance



Winooski Parents and Students Project

The Winooski Parents and Students (WPS) Project has arisen from the advocacy efforts of parents and students with multicultural and ethnic backgrounds who were requesting reliable school bus services for students attending Winooski School District. Our grassroots initiative is solely led and managed by immigrants, refugees, and New Americans who speak Nepali, Somali, Swahili, Arabic, Kirundi, Spanish, Karen, Burmese, and other languages. WPS assists these community members and leaders in their efforts to claim their own power and make effective changes. We offer case management support, cultural brokers, interpretation services, and advocacy referral assistance.

1,274

Community members served

100%

Of those served were immigrants, refugees, New Americans, or family members

47

Events held

58

Medical and dental appointments facilitated

How The Grant Was Used

The funding made it possible to compensate people in WPS leadership positions, and also offer training sessions and direct support. We provided stipends to compensate people for their participation in meetings, events, activities, and our survey. A large portion of the funds was dedicated to purchasing supplies, sporting equipment, sensory objects, and cutting-edge technology that is currently being used for a new multicultural community space geared toward engaging youth and families in the most diverse and low-income communities. The funds allowed us to hire 21 part-time employees and one full-time employee.

Impact

We served 1,274 community members, 100% of whom are multilingual immigrants, refugees, New Americans, or their family members. We provided comprehensive support services including case management, cultural brokerage, interpretation services, and advocacy referral assistance. WPS has been instrumental in addressing a variety of challenges such as evictions, affordable housing, medical appointments, financial aid, and utility bill issues. We also assisted with driving license procedures, identification and documentation, legal status, asylum information, legal aid referrals, work-related issues, transportation, school registration, and many other obstacles that individuals encounter. During this grant, we collaborated with 12 new partners and identified five new funders.

What's Next?

We are promoting our new multicultural community space where parents can bring their children and access case management services with cultural brokers and youth programs.

"We are creating the platform to unite all the different ethnic communities to promote resilience among those vulnerable populations."

—Coralí Cotrina, Winooski Parents and Students Project

Invaluable partnerships with community organizations have provided an opportunity to recognize the ongoing work happening every day. Many of these organizations fill the gaps in resources not traditionally provided through existing systems and are a reminder that centuries of racism and oppression have led to health disparities. Looking forward, we will continue our commitment to listen to, learn from, and support each of our community partners, respectfully and transparently. We share our deepest appreciation to community partners and their continual work to make Vermont a more equitable community.

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Participants in the Health Equity Partner Convening May 6, 2024. (Photo: Cat Cutillo)

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