OPPORTUNITY

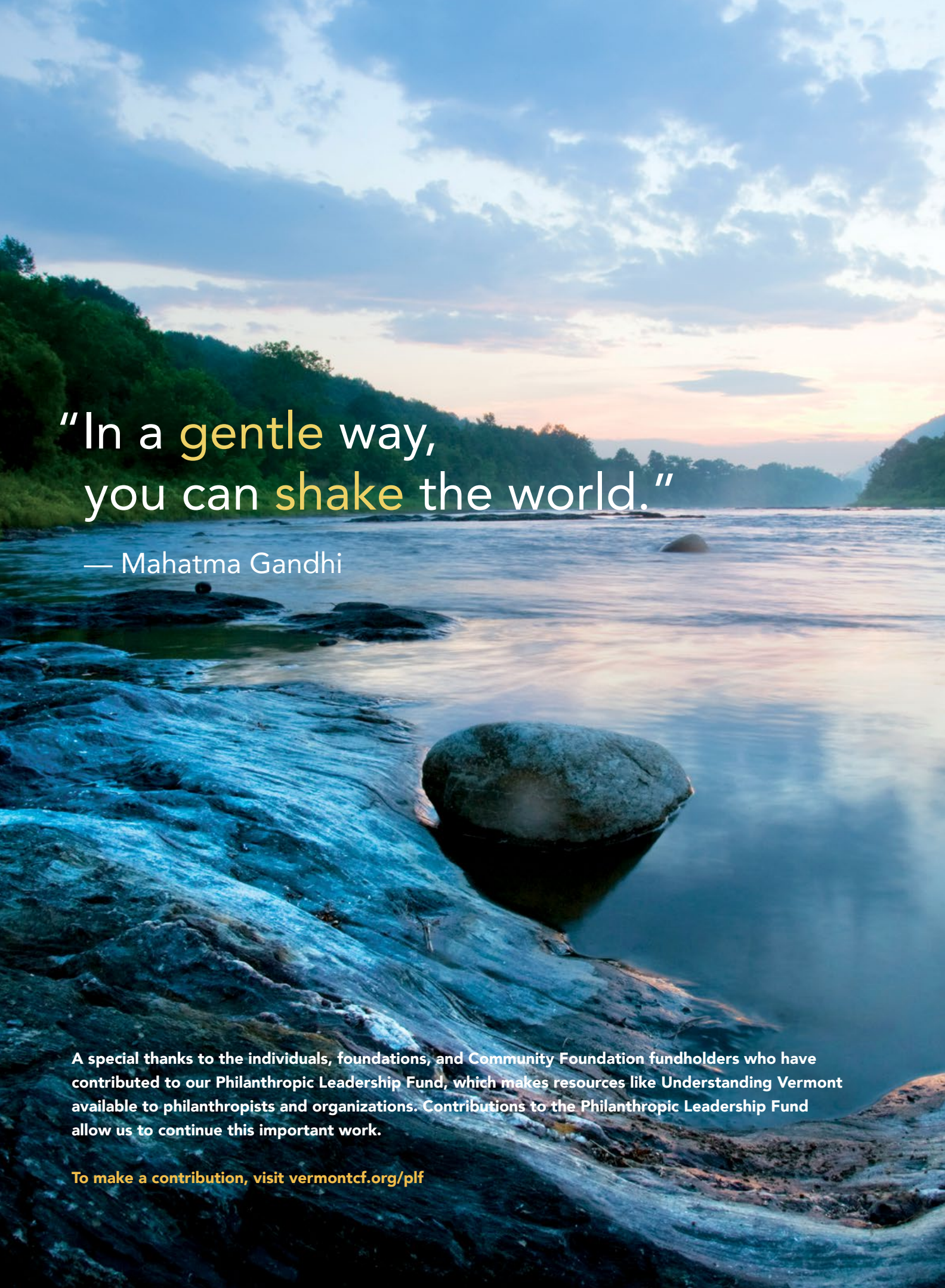
11 CRITICAL PATHS FOR PHILANTHROPY

IN VERMONT



UNDERSTANDING VERMONT 2016

THE VERMONT COMMUNITY FOUNDATION



A special thanks to the individuals, foundations, and Community Foundation fundholders who have contributed to our Philanthropic Leadership Fund, which makes resources like Understanding Vermont available to philanthropists and organizations. Contributions to the Philanthropic Leadership Fund allow us to continue this important work.

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OPPORTUNITY

11 CRITICAL PATHS FOR PHILANTHROPY IN VERMONT

UNDERSTANDING VERMONT 2016

THE VERMONT COMMUNITY FOUNDATION

Message from the President & CEO



Dear Friends,

Opportunity.

Vermont is a state with tremendous opportunity. This is a state where people have a deep sense of connectedness, an appreciation for hard work, and an eagerness to help each other out. And while Vermonters are a notably modest bunch, we could all be forgiven for allowing a measure of pride to seep through as we talk about what makes our state such a wonderful place in which to live, work, and play.

But opportunities don't only come from things that are working well. Often, the biggest opportunities come from the things that need the most work.

As much as we love our state, we face challenges in the years and decades ahead. We need the leadership of everyone who cares about community to tackle those challenges in creative, sustainable, and meaningful ways.

It's in that spirit that we present this edition of Understanding Vermont. In the pages that follow, we share 11 opportunities for philanthropy that we believe are especially strong at this moment in time.

How did we arrive at the list?

We looked at data about what's going well and not-so-well in our state. We asked philanthropists, nonprofit and community leaders, and others what issues matter most in our state today and where they thought the biggest opportunities were for philanthropy.

Based on the information we gathered, we selected the opportunities that have a strong economic benefit and a particularly meaningful role for philanthropy. These are important considerations in an environment where public funds for basic human needs continue to decrease, where there is more recognition than ever about how a strong local economy helps residents thrive, and where philanthropy needs to be increasingly nimble in the work it undertakes.

Encouragingly, much of what we heard supports the major areas of work in which the Community Foundation and its fundholders are already involved.

But many of the folks we spoke with also talked about the importance of connecting the different pieces of work that make for healthy and vital communities. You'll see a short piece on page 8 of this publication that explains why these connections matter so much.

Our conversations are helping us reassess how to move forward as a grantmaker. And as we do that, we are focusing not solely on the opportunities in this report, but also on related high-level trends that include:

- An expanding "opportunity gap" that makes it harder for people to break the cycle of disadvantage and threatens one of the fundamental tenets of our society here in America: that with hard work and perseverance, one can get ahead.
- A need to re-energize civil society, strengthening and building social capital in our communities.
- A set of challenges resulting from climate change, for which we are not fully prepared and that have the potential to disrupt everything from the quality of our water, to the availability of affordable housing, to our tourism revenue.
- A shifting demographic, which in Vermont is most characterized by an aging population and to a lesser extent, an out-migration of youth.

As responsible grantmakers and philanthropists, we must ask what this means for our work together. We don't pretend to have all the answers, but our hope is that we can spark dialogue and stimulate new thinking so that we're able to take full advantage of the opportunities that are in front of us.

Philanthropy, of course, cannot address these issues alone. We must work in close partnership with community organizations, businesses, and government to achieve what we dream about for this state.

I look forward to hearing your ideas.



Stuart Comstock-Gay
President & CEO
The Vermont Community Foundation

The Opportunities

To arrive at our list of 11 opportunities, we reviewed studies, articles, and reports that shed light on what's working and what's not; talked with scores of people throughout the state who work on a wide variety of issues; evaluated our own grant programs; and looked at what our fundholders support through their grantmaking. The resulting report is focused on opportunities that have a positive effect on Vermont's economy and that provide an especially meaningful role for philanthropy.

Worth Noting

For each of the 11 opportunities in this report, we highlight facts and figures that seemed especially noteworthy. A list of citations for all of the statistics in the publication is **available at vermontcf.org/uv**.

Promising Approaches

For each opportunity, we offer suggestions that you might consider supporting. The suggestions cannot, of course, be exhaustive or definitive; rather they are a starting point for action that will surely be informed by your own knowledge and interests. For each organization we list, there are many more that need support. For more ideas or to learn more, call our philanthropic advisors or visit vermontcf.org/uv.



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The Importance of Connections

There are as many approaches to philanthropy as there are philanthropists: single-issue, place-based, faith-based, loyalty to institutions—all are valid and have their role to play in making our communities stronger.

But there is also a complementary approach that can amplify the results of these strategies and lead to profound and lasting change: intersectional giving. This is when one looks for the "intersections" or "connection points" where issues, strategies, people, and organizations cross paths and magnify impact.

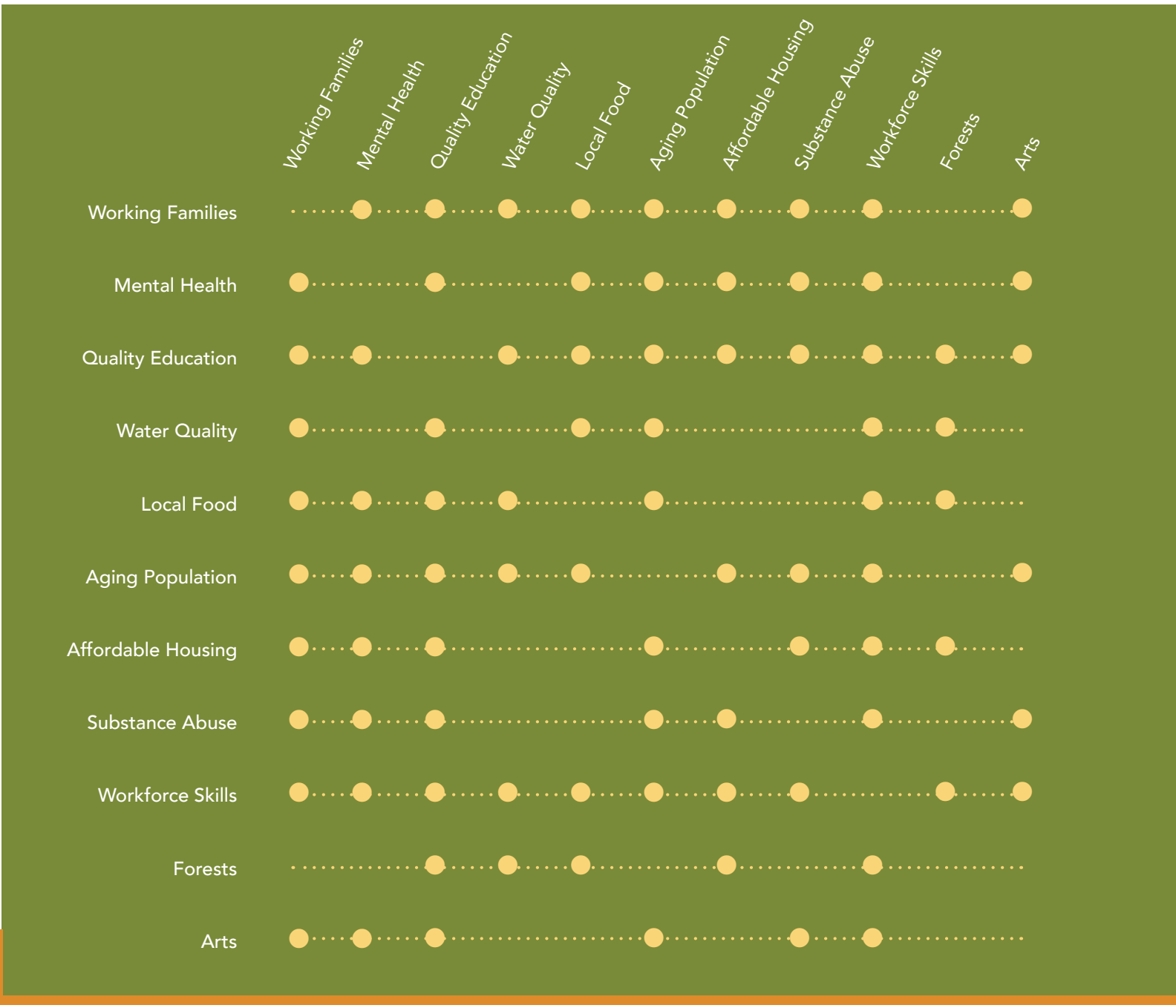
For example, funding a project that focuses on changing affordable housing policy to incorporate transportation issues for low-income people is a strategy that works at the intersection of several different pathways. Past public policy in many areas of the country often put affordable housing at a distance from most job opportunities, on the edges of towns, or on marginal land. This strategy virtually required low-income families to own and maintain often unreliable vehicles which are both bad for job security and for air quality. The problem is compounded by low or no access to public transportation in rural communities.

Funding intersectional work that connects, say, a community action agency, a housing authority, and an environmental organization to address these multiple pathways together is often a more effective strategy than funding each to separately address a single issue in isolation. And when you support efforts that unite different groups on a path towards a common goal, you increase the likelihood that their work will lead to lasting systemic change.

As grantmakers and philanthropists, simply being aware of the connections inherent in community work is enough to shift patterns of giving in ways that make contributions go farther.

How the Opportunities Connect

In the chart below and throughout the report, we have highlighted how the opportunities connect to help you use this report more effectively as a resource for your giving.



Families

Help Working Families Thrive

In Vermont's Northeast Kingdom, a young couple is eking their way through a long winter.

To afford housing, they're relegated to living far from their jobs, and they struggle under the expense of two cars. Periodically, the young man goes to fill a propane tank with just enough fuel to heat their home for a few more days.

There's never quite enough money to go around.

A sick child, an unexpected car repair, an expensive heating bill, fewer hours at work—for the working poor, these are the kinds of road blocks that can send a family spiraling into debt, hunger, or homelessness. An estimated 46,000 working families in Vermont aren't earning enough to make ends meet. Their pocketbooks are strained by rising food and energy costs, problems exacerbated by climate change, and by Vermont's high cost of living—the ninth highest in the nation. Many live in pockets of poverty where hunger, poor health, higher rates of mortality, and housing insecurity persist.

The tactics for lifting the working poor out of poverty look different than those designed to provide safety nets for the very poor.

Some of these, like minimum wage improvements and paid sick days, require policy changes. Other approaches include teaching financial literacy or providing access to more affordable and energy-efficient housing. Programs that lift the working poor out of poverty provide the kind of stability that allows families to plan for the future, to dream bigger, and to find safety and security. In doing so, these same programs lessen distractions for workers, reduce absenteeism and turnover, and create a stronger workforce.

WORTH NOTING

HIGH COST OF LIVING
Vermont's cost of living is the 9th most expensive in the country.

WORKING AND STRUGGLING
46,000 working families (nearly 1 in 4) in Vermont are not earning enough to make ends meet.

HIGH RENTS
More than one in five renting households in Vermont spends over 50% of its paycheck on rent.

COST OF CHILD CARE
The average Vermont family with two kids spends between $15,000-$20,000 a year on child care.

DEMAND FOR FOOD ASSISTANCE
Forty percent of all Vermont families rely in some measure on the food bank/food support system.

HUNGER
The hunger rate among Vermont seniors increased 60% between 2012 and 2014.

PROMISING APPROACHES

WORKING BRIDGES
On-the-job support for employees who are facing financial or social stresses—ranging from reliable transportation to mounting medical bills—is a win-win approach. In Franklin, Addison, Chittenden, and Grand Isle counties, the Working Bridges employer collaborative (started by the United Way) is connecting vulnerable employees to vital social and financial programs. Employees get the help they need, and employers see improvements in retention, productivity, and reduced absenteeism.

VERMONT WORKS FOR WOMEN
Vermont Works for Women provides programs dedicated to helping women find better-paying jobs in typically male-dominated fields. Workforce training and mentoring programs can range in length from one-day seminars to weeks-long programs and are helping women break into fields such as skilled manufacturing, coding, and law enforcement.

MORE THAN WHEELS
More Than Wheels provides financial assistance to help Vermonters purchase cars with low-interest loans—an approach that, when tied with the right education, can build financial literacy, repair credit, and provide reliable transportation crucial for a rural workforce.



Working Families Connects to:

- Mental Health
- Quality Education
- Water Quality
- Local Food
- Aging Population
- Affordable Housing
- Substance Abuse
- Workforce Skills
- Arts

Health

Improve Access to Mental Health Care

Vermont consistently ranks among the healthiest states in the nation—and yet on the subject of mental health, we suffer high rates of depression, suicide, and substance abuse.

In certain geographic pockets of the state, some residents have virtually no access to mental health services. In some cases, patients in crisis are relegated to waiting in emergency rooms for psychiatric treatment spots to open. Meanwhile, providers on the front line of community mental health face high caseloads and low salaries—a recipe for high rates of turnover, which in turn impacts care. Patients are left with long waits before they get treatment, at precisely the time they can least afford the wait.

The most vulnerable populations—including youth, seniors, low-income Vermonters, offenders and ex-offenders, and LGBTQ youth—are also those who are the most underserved by the current mental health system.

Vermont is working to shift the majority of mental health services away from central facilities and into community clinics—a move that not only improves care, but cuts down on overall health care spending and addresses illnesses before they blossom into more costly crises. Already new partnerships and approaches are showing promising results. Collaborations between homeless shelters and mental health workers are bringing more services directly to the people who most need them. Community mental health agencies are partnering with private practice doctors to improve screening and to share patient records and information. Meanwhile, schools are increasingly embracing mindfulness practices to teach children firsthand the tools they need to be centered and self-aware.

These are small steps forward—necessary ones, if Vermont wants to take care of minds and bodies.

WORTH NOTING

NEED FOR SERVICES

5.8%: the percentage of Vermont adults who had a serious mental illness within the year prior to being surveyed; this is significantly higher than the national average.

SUICIDE RISK

24,000: the number of Vermont adults who had serious thoughts about suicide in the year prior to being surveyed. Suicide is the second leading cause of death for Vermonters ages 15-34.

LONG WAITLIST TIMES

One year: the approximate length of time patients spend on the waitlist for the pediatric psychiatry clinic at the University of Vermont Medical Center.

TOO FEW GETTING TREATMENT

43%: the precentage of Vermonters with depression who are not treated.

PROMISING APPROACHES

PHYSICAL AND MENTAL HEALTH INTEGRATION

By working directly with hospitals and physicians' offices, Washington County Mental Health Services is training providers to flag mental health issues earlier. Better integrating physical and mental health services means providers can diagnose problems sooner, better address the stigma of seeking treatment for mental illness, and coordinate treatment with primary care providers and emergency rooms.

DECENTRALIZED FACILITIES

Small, decentralized community mental health facilities such as Soteria House in Burlington and Alyssum Respite in Rochester offer mental health patients a quiet and calm living environment, holistic medicine, and geographic diversity so they can be close to their families.

PEER SUPPORT GROUPS

Peer support groups, like the ones used by NAMI-VT and Vermont Psychiatric Survivors, are now being supported by the state as a way of successfully tackling mental health issues and providing support for families in a cost-effective way.

ON-SITE SCREENING AND COUNSELING

At Groundworks Collaborative (formerly Morningside Shelter), on-site mental health and drug counseling for residents provided through a partnership with the Brattleboro Retreat eliminates some of the barriers—including time, transportation, and stigma—that can prevent individuals from seeking treatment.



Mental Health Connects to:

- Working Families
- Quality Education
- Local Food
- Aging Population
- Affordable Housing
- Substance Abuse
- Workforce Skills
- Arts

Education

Bring Quality Education to All Residents

When Vermont passed legislation in 2014 that guarantees universal access to preschool for all three- and four-year-olds, the state made progress toward leveling the playing field for Vermont school children. Decades of research have proven that high-quality early education programs provide both short- and long-term benefits for children, families, and society. Soon, more Vermont children from low-income families will see those benefits firsthand.

But Vermont still has tremendous ground to cover.

Vermont has among the lowest rates in the country for children from low-income families attending academic and enrichment programs outside of school. With less access to out-of-school learning opportunities, these children fall further and further behind their better-resourced peers with each passing school year. Meanwhile, Vermont middle and high schools provide limited career education or guidance. Students from low-income families often have lower aspirations for their lives beyond high school, be it in the workforce, at a technical school, or in two- or four-year collegiate programs. While Vermont ranks well in high school graduation rates, our pipeline to post-secondary education is broken, and the state's success falls off steeply when considering post-secondary aspiration, enrollment, and completion.

Lifting up all Vermont students means providing better access to enriching educational experiences.

It means showing students realistic and affordable paths to post-secondary education—a challenge at a time when the state college system, which is the most affordable post-secondary option for Vermont students, faces chronic underinvestment. It means helping students envision their futures with optimism, ambition, and drive. We all benefit from this push: In the end, these efforts can build a more skilled, engaged workforce, unite the business community with educators, and keep Vermont residents fully employed.

WORTH NOTING

ROOM TO GROW PRESCHOOL

62%: the percentage of low-income three- and four-year-olds in Vermont who do not attend preschool.

MORE ENRICHMENT NEEDED

Vermont ranks last in the nation for the percentage of low-income children who participate in academic and enrichment programs outside of school time.

FIRST-GENERATION ASPIRATIONS

Vermont high school students who are the first-generation of their family to consider post-secondary education have aspirations that range from 20% to 26% lower than non-first-generation students.

PROMISING APPROACHES

LET'S GROW KIDS

In 2014, the Permanent Fund for Vermont's Children launched a multi-year statewide education campaign—Let's Grow Kids—to raise awareness about "brain science" and ensure that everyone understands the importance of development during the early years of childhood.

OUT-OF-SCHOOL LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES

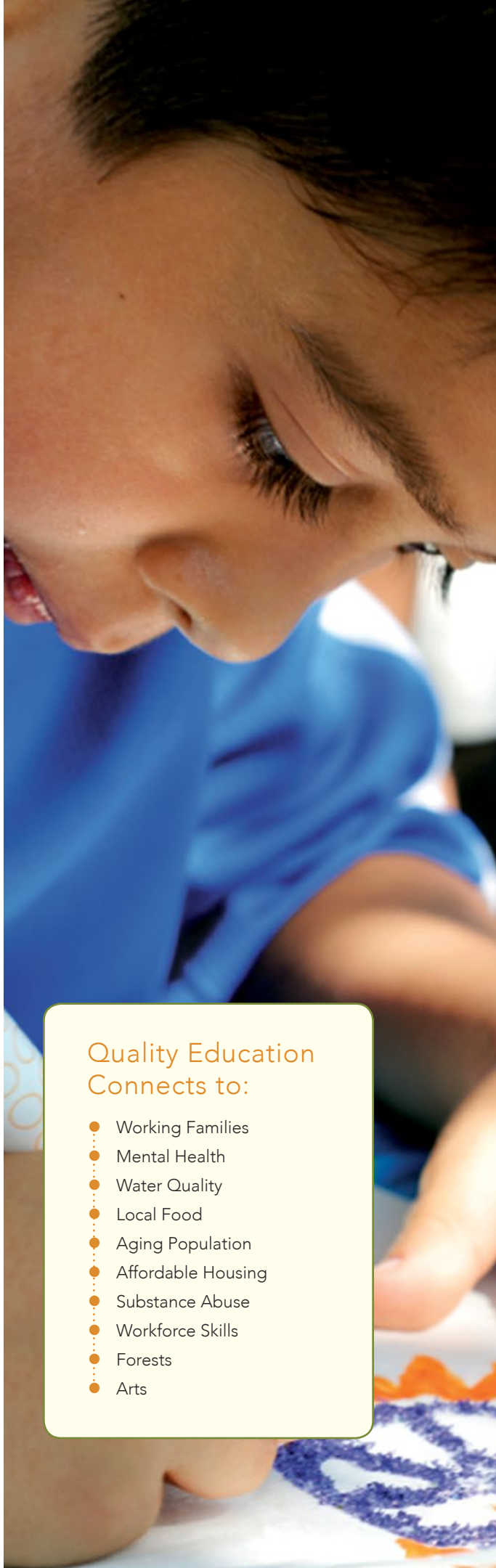
Out-of-school learning opportunities (for example, during summer breaks or after school) provide opportunities to close the "achievement gap" by offering curricula enrichment, healthy food, and quality supervision. Public-private partnerships such as Vermont Afterschool Inc. provide the statewide structure, professional development, and advocacy resources necessary to build and sustain innovative programming across the state.

VERMONT STATE COLLEGES

Vermont State Colleges offer the most affordable post-secondary opportunities in the state. They enroll the largest population of Vermont residents, first generation college students, and low-income college students.

INTRODUCTION TO COLLEGE STUDIES (ICS)

This program is designed to motivate high school students to pursue a college education and to clarify the processes involved. Targeted efforts to enroll first-generation college students introduce them to college campuses and culture and help them hone their time management and study skills. Participants who successfully complete the course earn a voucher for a free college course at any Vermont State College. Seventy-one percent of ICS graduates enroll in college within 16 months after graduating from high school, an 18% increase over the direct enrollment rate for the state.



Quality Education Connects to:

- Working Families
- Mental Health
- Water Quality
- Local Food
- Aging Population
- Affordable Housing
- Substance Abuse
- Workforce Skills
- Forests
- Arts



Giving Tip

Give together

Collective action leads to greater results. The Community Foundation's *Giving Together* program shares some of the best grant opportunities it receives with its donors. Call us to learn more.

Giving Tip

Make multi-year grants

Systemic change often requires more time. The Community Foundation can help donors decide when it's appropriate to structure grants over longer periods and can handle the administrative details of doing so.


EXPLORING THE MOON

Water

Clean Up Our Rivers and Lakes

The water lapping at the shores of Missisiquoi Bay looks like bright green sludge. It's high summer, and down the length of Vermont's most iconic water body, phosphorous is fueling rampant, sometimes toxic blue-green algae blooms. Swimmers stay clear. Pet owners keep their dogs on leashes. These days, the blooms are as much a sign of summer in Vermont as creemees and lightning bugs.

This is a problem that sits squarely on Vermonters' shoulders.

The Green Mountain State is the largest contributor of pollution to Lake Champlain, ahead of New York and Quebec. Some sections of the lake are so impaired that there may be no hope of fully restoring them. The problem extends beyond the state's most iconic water body to the many state lakes, rivers, and streams that do not meet national water quality standards. And the challenge is exacerbated by climate change impacts, such as rising water temperatures and more severe weather events which overwhelm municipal wastewater systems.

In the long run, this pollution endangers human health, drinking water supplies, and state tourism revenue.

A recent resident-requested tax reassessment in the lakeside town of Georgia lowered the value of waterfront properties by over $1 million, reducing revenue to local and state governments.

If Vermont wants to maintain its reputation as a steward of the environment, residents upstream will need to care as much and as deeply as those downstream. Cities will need to separate stormwater from wastewater systems. Farmers will need to reckon with the impacts of their industry and potentially radically reimagine what farming looks like in Vermont. But so too will developers, foresters, homeowners, and motorists need to realign the way we live in the context of water quality. It's time for a sea change.

WORTH NOTING

CUTTING PHOSPHOROUS RUN-OFF

36%: the amount by which Vermont needs to cut phosphorous run-off into Lake Champlain to meet federal standards for water quality.

HEALTH OF LAKESHORE LAND

82%: the percentage of Vermont lakeshore lands in "poor" or "fair" condition because of excessive clearing.

WASTEWATER IN LAKE WATERWAYS

In the first nine months of 2015, more than 2.4 million gallons of untreated sewage and effluent flowed into Vermont waterways.

PROMISING APPROACHES

WATER QUALITY LEADERSHIP

Independent leadership organizations such as the Conservation Law Foundation, Lake Champlain International, the Vermont Natural Resources Council, and the Connecticut River Watershed Council are raising awareness, providing testimony, and acting as watchdogs for state agencies; such groups are critical to keeping the water quality issue front and center for the state and the media.

COLLABORATIVE APPROACHES

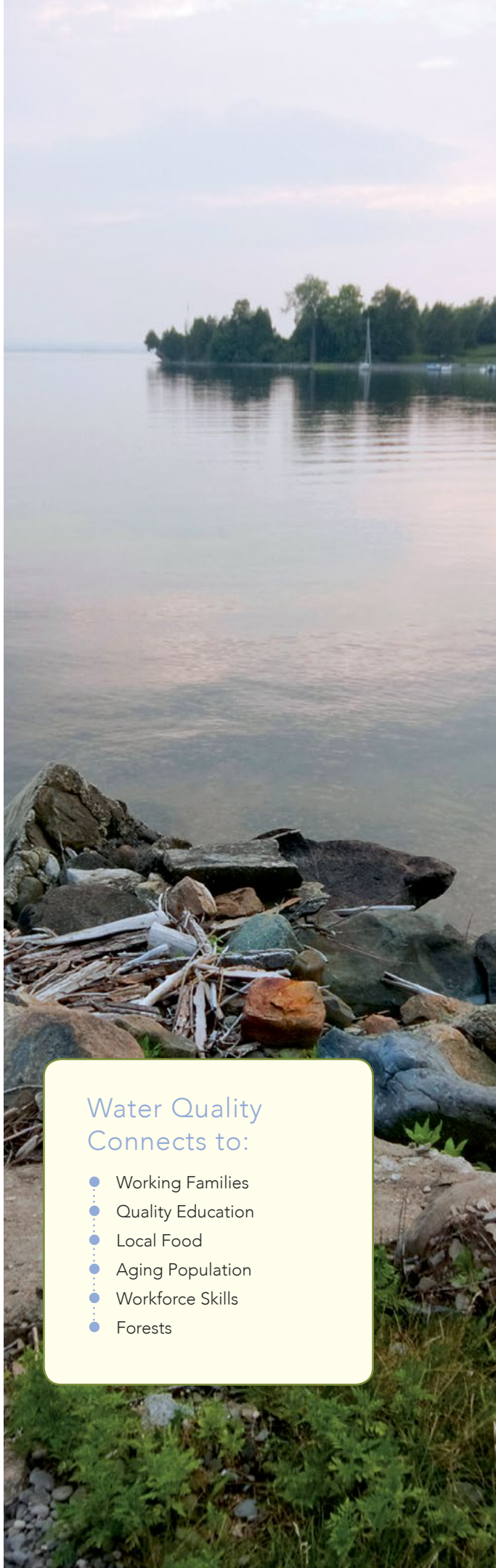
Local watershed organizations are increasingly using collaborative approaches, as evidenced by Watersheds United, to share resources—and find a larger voice and bigger impact on the state stage.

FARMER-LED COALITIONS

Farmer-led coalitions such as the Champlain Valley Farmer Coalition and the Farmer's Watershed Alliance are experimenting with new farming methods to reduce runoff, while also making valuable inroads into the state's agricultural communities to encourage peers to adopt best practices.

NEW TECHNICAL APPROACHES

Vermont Technical College and the University of Vermont Extension are researching new technical approaches to reducing phosphorous runoff and improving farming practices—giving farmers proven tools and techniques to cut pollution.



Water Quality Connects to:

- Working Families
- Quality Education
- Local Food
- Aging Population
- Workforce Skills
- Forests

Local Food

Benefit More Consumers and Producers

It's a Saturday morning in mid-summer, and the farmer's market is bustling with farmers, cheesemongers, and eager patrons.

For good reason, Vermont is nationally lauded for this abundance of good food.

Yet the vibrancy of this movement isn't equally shared by all Vermonters.

This can be an expensive place to produce food, and sustainably-produced food often carries a higher price tag than mass-produced commodities shipped in from out of state. Low-income Vermonters struggle to achieve basic food security, let alone consider how and where their food was produced. Meanwhile, many Vermont farmers face a hardscrabble existence: Farm incomes today are lower than they were in 1970. In fact, only about half of farmers list farming as their primary occupation. Low wages and poor working conditions have been a historic hallmark of the agricultural industry—especially among migrant workers, who work behind the scenes of Vermont's iconic dairy industry.

How do we fill the plates of the poor and hungry, expand access to local foods, and ensure that farmers are fairly compensated for their labors?

That's the riddle at the heart of the local food movement.

Tough though it may be to untangle, food system thought leaders are already hashing out innovative ways to strike that balance. If we get this right, we'll build a system that brings sustenance to farmers, foodies, and our must vulnerable neighbors alike.

WORTH NOTING

HARD TO MAKE A PROFIT
While the number of farms in Vermont increased between 2007 and 2012, 58% of farms reported net losses in 2012.

HIGH FOOD INSECURITY
34,320: the number of Vermont households that lack reliable access to sufficient, affordable, nutritious food.

NEW FOOD RELATED JOBS
4,189: the number of new food-related jobs added in Vermont between 2009 and 2013.

FOOD PRODUCTION WAGES LOW
Only two of the top 20 occupations in food production in Vermont had higher than average wages.

PROMISING APPROACHES

STRONG FOOD SECURITY NETWORK
Vermont has a vibrant, creative, and extensive food security network in place with strong state organizations such as the Vermont Foodbank, Hunger Free Vermont, and the Vermont Gleaning Collective, as well as dozens of local food shelves and community kitchens.

FARMER-FOCUSED PROGRAMS
Farmer-focused nonprofits and educational groups, such as NOFA-Vermont, Rutland Area Farm and Food Link, the Intervale Center, and the Center for an Agricultural Economy are helping farmers increase their revenue and profitability. These programs can assist farmers with the complicated world of business planning, diversification, and access to new markets.

MIGRANT WORKERS
Migrant Justice, an advocacy group working on behalf of migrant workers, is fighting to improve living and working conditions on farms, while also addressing concerns such as bias-free policing, access to drivers' licenses, and health coverage.

LOCAL FOOD SURPLUS MANAGEMENT
Salvation Farms and their Vermont Gleaning Collective has expanded and developed opportunities to get fresh food into the foodbanks and food shelves, supporting farmers by clearing fields and developing an extensive volunteer base.

THINKING ABOUT THE ENTIRE FOOD CYCLE
Thanks in part to the efforts of the Vermont Farm-to-Plate Network, Vermont is producing more local food and added more than 4,100 food-related jobs and more than 660 new farm businesses between 2009 and 2013.



Local Food Connects to:

- Working Families
- Mental Health
- Quality Education
- Water Quality
- Aging Population
- Workforce Skills
- Forests

Confront the Realities of an Aging Population

Do we want to stay in our homes, or move into assisted living facilities? Will we continue to work? What resources will we have for travel, for health care, and for our basic living necessities?

These are the questions we all face as we age.

But as individual Vermonters map their plans for their later years, the state they call home will also need to reckon with the realities of aging. By 2030, the state estimates that nearly 30 percent of Vermont's population will be 65 or older.

In worst-case scenarios, aging Vermonters can find themselves living in dilapidated old houses, cut off without transportation, and struggling with isolation and health care concerns.

Seniors also face specific challenges when it comes to food access; they must overcome stigma, paperwork, lack of mobility, and sometimes face increasing difficulty in preparing their own food at home. The rural nature of the state only exacerbates many of these challenges.

The aging workforce directly impacts Vermont's economy, and the fact that our population skews older can make it difficult for employers to attract young families to the state. Vermont's aging demographic is fueling a growing demand for personal care workers, but these jobs are often low-paying.

Already, the state has partnered with Maine and New Hampshire to collaborate with and learn from neighbors in northern New England. With foresight, Vermont can both adapt to the challenges of serving an aging population and evolve to become one of the best places in the country to grow old.

WORTH NOTING

OLDER VERMONTERS
Vermont's population of residents aged 65 and older is growing 20% faster than the national rate for this age group.

SHORTAGE OF HOUSING
8,000: the projected shortage of affordable housing units for seniors by 2020.

MALNUTRITION
50%: the percentage of hospitalized Vermont seniors who suffer from malnutrition severe enough to either cause illness or impede recovery.

HOME CARE AND DELIVERED MEALS
Vermont ranks first in the nation for the number of residents 65 years and older who receive personal and home care and ranks sixth for those receiving home-delivered meals.

PROMISING APPROACHES

COLLABORATION AND WRAPAROUND SERVICES
Agencies on aging, home health, mental health, hospitals, housing agencies, and universities are increasingly collaborating to serve the needs of Vermont's aging population. The Support And Services at Home (SASH) model is piloting a new program with onsite care coordinators and wellness nurses to provide wraparound services to their clients in partnership with the other community service providers.

HOMESHARE VERMONT
Homeshare Vermont is pairing senior Vermonters or Vermonters living with disabilities with others who need an affordable place to live. The program helps Vermonters stay in their own homes by sharing expenses and household responsibilities, while giving low-income Vermonters affordable housing options. Both residents benefit from companionship and support.

GOOD FOOD, GOOD HEALTH
The Good Food Good Health program, a partnership between Southwestern Vermont Health Care and Meals on Wheels of Bennington County, dramatically lowered the re-hospitalization rate of seniors by promoting and providing fresh food.

DESIGNING AND PLANNING AGE-FRIENDLY TOWNS
A collaboration between the Newport City Renaissance Corporation, AARP, and other local nonprofits embraces the impact of an aging population by focusing on housing, transportation, caregiving, community engagement, volunteering, and social inclusion. One such nonprofit, the Orleans County Restorative Justice Center, works to combat elder abuse and provides community forums to discuss challenges within the senior community and opportunities to address them.



Aging Population Connects to:

- Working Families
- Mental Health
- Quality Education
- Water Quality
- Local Food
- Affordable Housing
- Substance Abuse
- Workforce Skills
- Arts

Housing

Expand Affordable Housing

One brick, and the whole house came tumbling down—that's how one 55-year-old sums up how his family of five went from renting the same home for 13 years to living in a motel. First came a rent hike; later, he lost one of his part-time jobs. The family's savings dwindled, then bottomed out.

Housing in Vermont isn't just a question of individual finances.

The state's housing gap is projected to increase over the next five years for both rental housing and homeownership. Thousands of families and seniors will lack affordable options. The state's pool of affordable housing is one of the worst in the country, and low vacancy rates across the state only tighten the squeeze. It's a problem for Vermonters of all stripes; low-income families struggle to find affordable places to live, but so too do the skilled workers employers are trying to attract to the state. Residents who live in manufactured homes are especially vulnerable to displacement as a result of severe weather brought on by climate change.

Already, the problem is pushing households into crisis: Homelessness in Vermont shot up nearly 30% over the last five years.

The crisis in affordable housing touches almost every vulnerable population. An estimated three-quarters of adults with severe mental illness are homeless. Some prisoners in the state corrections system remain behind bars solely because the state lacks enough approved beds for offenders re-entering society. Victims of domestic violence find themselves turned away from shelters that are already full.

If one brick is all it takes to bring the house tumbling down, then brick by brick is how housing advocates plan to solve the problem. They have tools and programs with proven track records, but so far, lack the resources to scale up.

WORTH NOTING

HOMELESSNESS IN VERMONT

Homelessness in Vermont increased 28% between 2009 and 2014.

TIGHT VACANCY RATE

1%: the vacancy rate for Vermont's affordable housing units. Four to six percent is considered a healthy market.

HOUSING COSTS

In 2013, nearly three out of five Vermonters spent more than 30% of their income on housing.

OLDER HOUSING STOCK

Vermont's housing stock is the second-oldest in the country, resulting in homes that are expensive to heat and maintain.

PROMISING APPROACHES

INTEGRATE WORK THROUGH STRONG COALITIONS

Many housing-related organizations do strong work throughout the state. The Vermont Affordable Housing Coalition represents nearly all the major players in affordable housing including: developers; community land trusts; homeless shelters and service providers; public housing authorities; funding agencies; residents' associations; community action agencies; regional planners; and housing, disability, and tenants' rights advocates. By integrating these services, communities leverage the expertise of each institution, putting together deals that spread risk and share resources.

THINK CREATIVELY

COTS has a wide menu of traditional and not-so-traditional options to address the range of housing-related needs in their community, from housing substance abusers to the chronically homeless, as well as transitional housing and homelessness prevention. They continue to offer creative solutions to housing-related crises, including development of a rent arrearage fund and risk-guarantee programs.

WEATHERIZATION AND REPAIRS

COVER Home Repair works with homeowners and volunteers to provide urgently-needed repairs and weatherization for low-income homeowners in the Upper Valley.

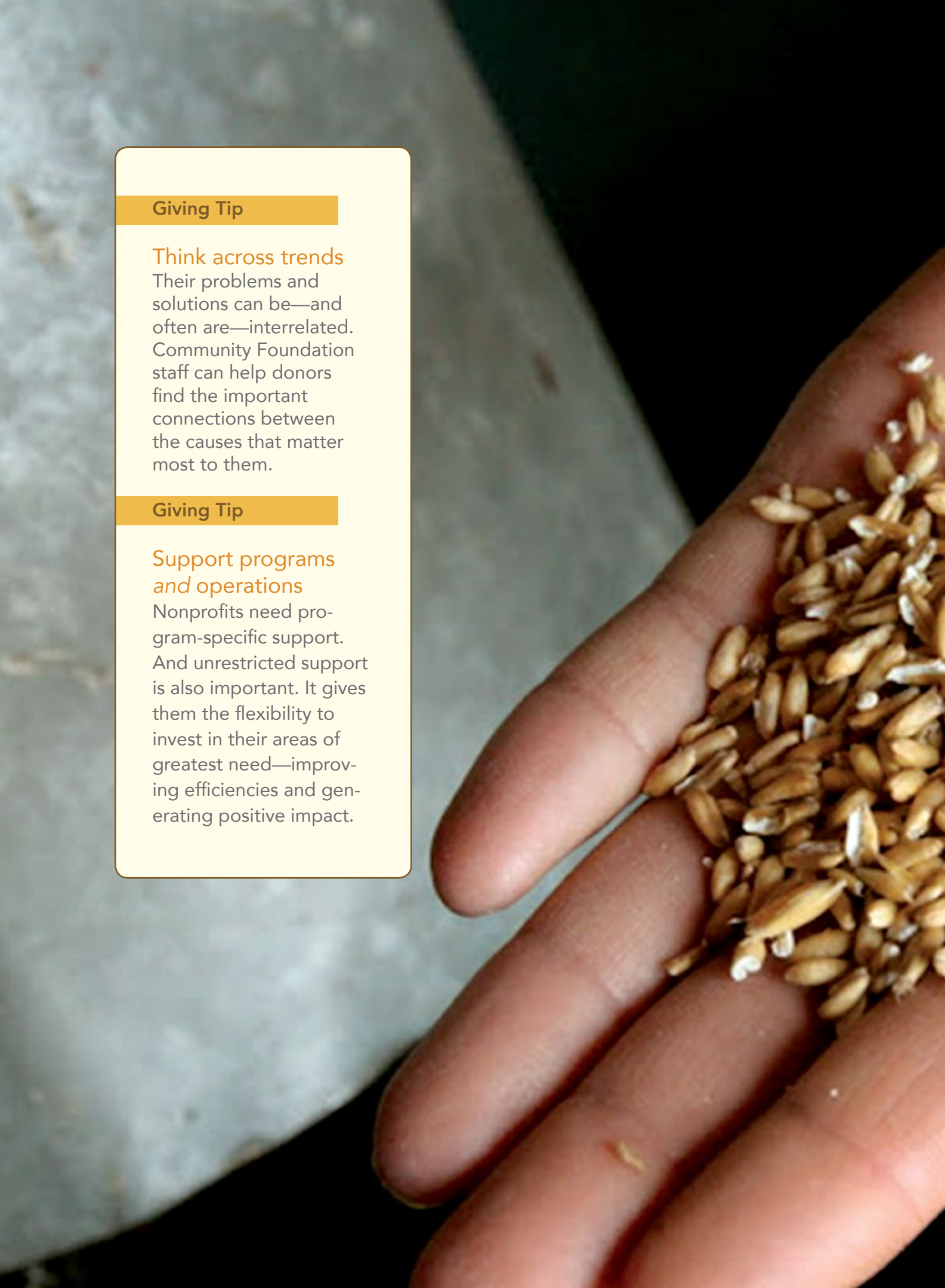
COOPERATIVE COMMUNITIES

The Champlain Valley Office of Economic Opportunity has an initiative that promotes the transfer of new or existing manufactured home parks into cooperatively-financed and operated communities, which gives homeowners more control over capital improvements and emergency planning, reducing the vulnerability of these parks to severe weather events.



Affordable Housing Connects to:

- Working Families
- Mental Health
- Quality Education
- Aging Population
- Substance Abuse
- Workforce Skills
- Forests



Giving Tip

Think across trends

Their problems and solutions can be—and often are—interrelated. Community Foundation staff can help donors find the important connections between the causes that matter most to them.

Giving Tip

Support programs *and* operations

Nonprofits need program-specific support. And unrestricted support is also important. It gives them the flexibility to invest in their areas of greatest need—improving efficiencies and generating positive impact.



Tackle Substance Abuse

When Governor Peter Shumlin called out the "opiate epidemic" in a State of the State address in 2014, national news outlets jumped on the story:

Bucolic Vermont had a drug problem.

This wasn't news to the families and communities in Vermont hardest hit by illicit drug use. They already knew about the boarded-up houses, the property crimes, the overdoses, the long waiting lists for treatment.

Vermont's rate of illicit drug use ranks high nationally, especially for teens.

Of particular concern are heroin, methamphetamine, and pharmaceutical drug abuse. Drug related crimes are on the rise, up 46% since 2009. Drug use and associated crimes are filling state prisons, where up to 80% of incarcerated individuals can trace their arrest back to drugs—and where access to treatment is severely limited. Already the opiate crisis is dealing an economic blow to the state; drug-addicted Vermonters and their families struggle with absenteeism and turnover at work. Addictions fuel high health care costs and reliance on government services.

Rethinking the state's approach to addiction and substance abuse will fall in part on policymakers, who are grappling with the implications of criminalizing drug abuse.

But prevention programs, drug intervention courts, peer mentoring and recovery programs, and community-based responses will also determine how effective Vermont will be in curbing this highly destructive force.

WORTH NOTING

HIGH RATE OF DRUG USE

Vermont ranks third in the nation for the percentage of 12-17 year olds who report using an illicit drug in the past 30 days.

CHILDREN ARE ESPECIALLY IMPACTED

80%: the percentage of children under the age of three taken into state custody for neglect and abuse who come from families with opiate addiction issues.

YOUTH AND ADDICTION

Some Vermont youth services agencies report that as many as 40% of the at-risk youth they serve are addicted to opiates.

PROMISING APPROACHES

TOWN-LEVEL COLLABORATIVE EFFORTS

Communities are increasingly turning to collaborative approaches—including businesses, neighborhood groups, churches, police, and others—to tackle issues related to drugs and drug-related crime. Project Vision in Rutland includes efforts to improve communication among agencies and is sparking a sense of forward movement in a town hard hit by drug addiction.

MANAGING PAIN AND ADDICTION

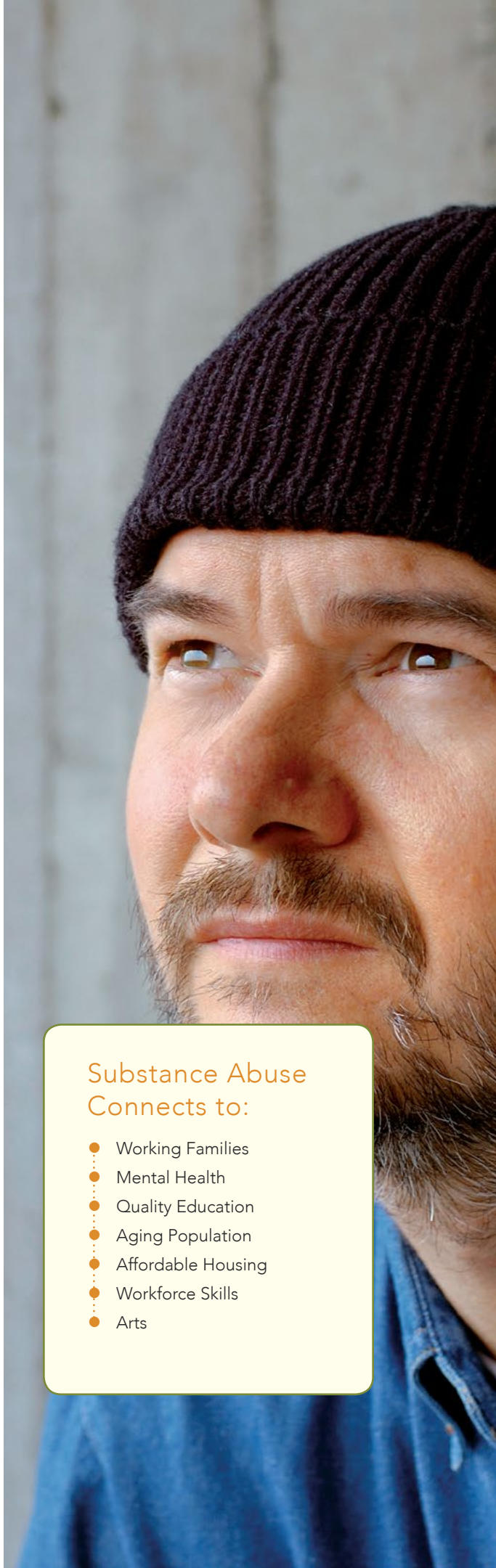
Recognizing abuse of prescription pain meds as one driver of opiate addiction, the Northwestern Comprehensive Pain Initiative, a program of Northwest Medical Center, combines chronic pain management and addiction efforts, allowing physicians who are experts in both to better monitor patient responses.

VERMONTERS FOR CRIMINAL JUSTICE REFORM

Vermonters for Criminal Justice Reform provides advocacy, outreach, and education. They connect with the families of the incarcerated, develop and promote legislation around justice reform, and teach the community about the issues related to incarceration and criminal justice. In light of the increase in drug-related crimes, the organization promotes sentencing reform and substance abuse treatment as an alternative to incarceration.

REHABILITATION INSTEAD OF JAIL

Vermont's court system is providing more options to Vermonters facing trial for drug-related crimes. Programs such as Spectrum Youth and Family Services' Rapid Referral as well as the Rapid Intervention Community Court (a partnership between Burlington Community Justice Center and the Vermont State Attorney's office) can divert Vermonters from the crowded criminal justice system while also providing better access to treatment and restitution to the community.



Substance Abuse Connects to:

- Working Families
- Mental Health
- Quality Education
- Aging Population
- Affordable Housing
- Workforce Skills
- Arts

Workforce

Match Workforce Skills to Employer Needs

Three hundred plumbers.
More than two thousand nurses.
Six hundred construction managers.
Nearly eight hundred elementary school teachers.

These are the kinds and numbers of jobs expected to open in Vermont in the next twenty years. High-pay, high-growth jobs do exist in the Green Mountain State.

But will Vermonters have the right training to fill them?

What stands in the way of matching jobs with jobseekers is a critical skills gap. In five very short years, between 60% and 65% of job openings will require some sort of post-secondary training, and yet too few young people are choosing post-secondary education. Of those who do, too few are completing their courses of study. Limited opportunities exist for adults looking for workforce training or adult education. Increasingly, business leaders are identifying the mismatch between the skills employers need and the qualifications of the local workforce as one of the biggest problems facing businesses in the state.

Without locals to fill those jobs, businesses have two choices: to hire in from out-of-state, or to relocate.

Grim headlines about Vermont's economic outlook don't fully reflect the promise of exciting and evolving economic opportunities. The question facing the state, employers, and universities will be one of aligning educational opportunities with workforce needs. Doing so will make Vermont a more attractive place to run a business, to live and work, and to put down roots. Livable wages will be available—to those who have the education and training to earn them.

WORTH NOTING

FEWER COLLEGE DEGREES AWARDED

Nationally, between 60-65% of all jobs in the next decade will require a 2- or 4-year degree, yet it's estimated that fewer than 27% of Vermont 9th graders will complete college.

MISMATCH OF SKILLS

Vermont business leaders often describe the mismatch between the skills and experience they need and the qualifications of the local workforce as one of the biggest problems facing businesses in Vermont.

TOO FEW DEGREES

In a recent study, Vermont was ranked 46th out of 50 states in the number of science and engineering degrees that are awarded through in-state universities and colleges, yet technology companies are looking for employees who have a strong foundation in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) fields.

PROMISING APPROACHES

RESEARCH AND IDENTIFY PROMISING JOBS

The Most Promising Jobs campaign of the J. Warren and Lois McClure Foundation is researching and identifying high-demand, high-wage jobs and careers in Vermont by level of education and training required. Information is broadly distributed to high schools, state colleges, veterans' offices, and beyond, with the goal of better educating Vermonters about job opportunities.

TRAIN VULNERABLE WOMEN AND GIRLS

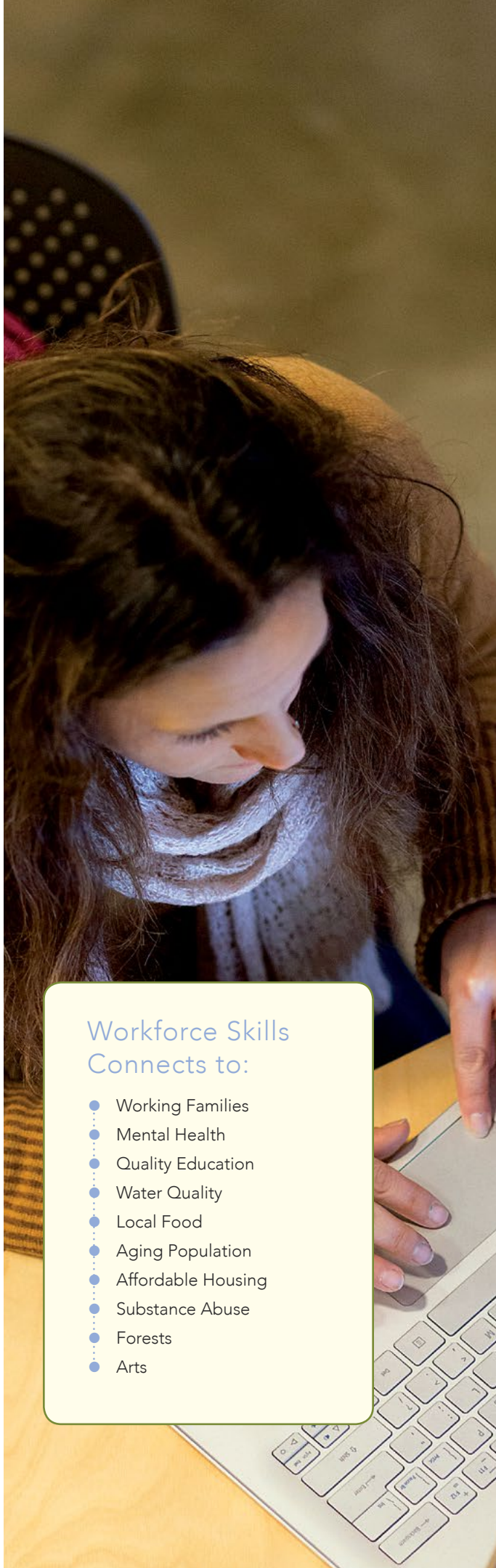
Vermont Works for Women provides nationally-recognized summer and afterschool programs—such as Rosie's Girls—for middle and high school girls that focus on careers in the skilled trades, where a growth in high-demand, high-wage jobs is projected in Vermont.

TECH INITIATIVE

Vermont Technical College's Tech Initiative helps students get a running start on associates' degrees in technical fields. This approach includes integrating more internships, partnerships with local businesses, and college-level coursework while students are still in high school. Students ultimately pay very little towards this associate degree.

HANDS-ON CAREER EXPLORATION

MedQuest, a residential, intensive career exploration program of Vermont Area Health Education Centers, is focused on health care and gives students a chance to dive into a prospective career. Hands-on workshops, job shadowing experiences, and interactive presentations aim to excite students about high-growth, high-wage jobs in the medical industry.



Workforce Skills Connects to:

- Working Families
- Mental Health
- Quality Education
- Water Quality
- Local Food
- Aging Population
- Affordable Housing
- Substance Abuse
- Forests
- Arts

Forests

Limit Forest Fragmentation

Vermont has already established a solid foundation for protecting our natural landscape and promoting thoughtful, responsible development. Yet Vermont's forests still face the threat of fragmentation as Vermonters consume land at a rate that outpaces population growth. New development can break the long tracts of land that enable recreation and protect biodiversity, wildlife corridors, forest habitat, and water quality.

Protecting forestland is all the more urgent in light of climate change.

Vermont's forest will be a stronghold for birds and wildlife in the decades ahead. Forest fragmentation degrades water quality and fuels the growth of invasive plant and pest species. Healthy forests also do important—if sometimes invisible—work for the ecosystem, protecting against floods, reducing sediment and pollution runoff, and sequestering carbon dioxide-equivalent greenhouse gases. These woodlands also support tourism, while providing the foundation for a strong working forest economy.

Stewarding resilient, adaptable, and healthy forests will pay dividends for wildlife and for Vermonters who depend on the forests for their livelihoods.

Yet conserving land requires time, money, and the partnership and patience of landowners. Even landowners eager to conserve their land face the financial barrier of stewardship and conservation fees. The costs of owning an acre of forestland shot up 73% between 2003 and 2009 due to rising land values and property taxes, putting additional pressure on landowners to sell.

Vermont has already developed an ethos of conservation, as well as programs—including tax incentives for managing forests for bird and animal habitat—that encourage responsible use. What the northern forests need now is a redoubled effort to protect large tracts of land from the quiet threat of fragmentation.

WORTH NOTING

IN PRIVATE HANDS

80%: the percentage of Vermont forests that are privately owned; more than half of that land is owned by senior Vermonters, creating an uncertain future for a large amount of forest in the state.

FOREST INDUSTRY REVENUE

$1.5 billion: the amount of revenue that Vermont's forest products industry generates annually.

PROMISING APPROACHES

ESTABLISH AND PROTECT WILDLIFE CORRIDORS

Conservation groups are concentrating on establishing and protecting wildlife corridors to promote biodiversity and resiliency and are focusing more than ever on stewardship. Organizations such as the Vermont Land Trust, the Nature Conservancy, the Vermont Rivers Conservancy, the Vermont Natural Resources Council, the Trust for Public Land, and local land trusts are recognized nationally for the extent and quality of their work.

CREATING JOBS AND CONSERVING FORESTS

The Northern Forest Center is focused on creating jobs, leveraging investments, and conserving forests for community benefit. Its Skilled Workforce Initiative provides a training and credentialing system to ensure the wood products manufacturing industry has enough skilled workers to compete in global markets. They also run programs that promote and develop wood heat and promote innovation in the wood products industry.

EDUCATE WOODLAND OWNERS

Educational efforts are teaching woodlands owners how to nurture the health and biodiversity of their forest and earn a modest and sustainable income from their land. Organizations such as Vermont Coverts, the Trust for Public Land, Vermont Family Forests, Abenaki Helping Abenaki, and local land trusts encourage and assist these efforts.

SUGAR BUSH MANAGEMENT

Audubon Vermont, in partnership with the Vermont Department of Forests, Parks, and Recreation and the Vermont Maple Sugarmaker's Assocation, launched the Bird Friendly Maple Project. The project encourages maple sugar makers to manage their sugar bushes in environmentally friendly ways that nurture biodiversity among all types of plant and animal life—a vital effort considering the rapid growth of the maple syrup industry in Vermont in recent years.



Forests Connects to:

- Quality Education
- Water Quality
- Local Food
- Affordable Housing
- Workforce Skills

Keep the Arts Vibrant

In Chelsea, a small town in the Upper Valley, isolated teenagers are learning Shakespeare in order to build stronger mind-body connections. In Plainfield, couples and friends are settling into a renovated town theater that has brought new life to a sagging downtown. At a school in Burlington, young students from diverse backgrounds pick up their violins and learn to truly listen to one another.

When pressed to articulate what it is they value about their state, Vermonters consistently return to the importance of community—and the arts are the connective tissue that supports this sense of belonging.

Vermonters gather for concerts and contra dances, for school plays and their neighbors' gallery openings. Some studies show that arts education creates critical thinkers, builds resilience, and teaches students tolerance and empathy. Other research suggests that young people who are engaged in the arts are more likely to be recognized for academic achievement, participate in math and science fairs, and win awards for school attendance. And yet, there is very little hard data or academic evaluation proving this impact, often making it difficult for policy makers, school administrators, or arts presenters to advance their field.

Years of persistent budget constraints threaten Vermont's vibrant arts scene; from the largest arts organizations to the smallest grassroots efforts, organizations struggle tremendously to fund their efforts. Razor-thin school budgets often leave little room for arts education.

Philanthropy can play a role beyond funding programming, however. Support that strengthens the sector's advocacy and leadership skills is a critical piece of the equation, as is funding that allows arts organizations to quantify and study the impact of their work.

Strengthening the arts in Vermont will require the same skills we ask of young Shakespearean actors and would-be violinists: teamwork, listening skills, persistence, and resilience.

WORTH NOTING

ECONOMIC IMPACT

Windham County arts nonprofits participated in a 2012 national survey that showed their impact in the county: exceeded $10.8 million in economic activity, contributed more than $600,000 to state and local governments, and supported the equivalent of 330 full time jobs.

POSITIVE RETURN ON INVESTMENT

National studies reveal that federal, state, and local tax revenues generated by the arts community through direct and indirect sales return an average of $7 for every $1 invested by government in the arts.

HIGHER SCORES FOR STUDENTS

Multiple independent national studies have shown increased years of enrollment in arts courses are positively correlated with higher SAT verbal and math scores.

PROMISING APPROACHES

OFFERING A RANGE OF THE ARTS TO VERMONTERS

River Arts in Morrisville offers multi-disciplinary programming, resources, and events for Vermonters of all ages in Lamoille County and beyond. River Arts builds confidence and self-esteem for pregnant and parenting teens, builds strength and reduces isolation among seniors, creates an art-filled downtown business district, and provides a central gathering space in Morrisville that presents art that is both challenging and accessible.

BRINGING ART TO THE UNDERSERVED

Grass Roots Art and Community Effort (GRACE) is a leader in creating access to the arts for elderly and developmentally-disabled people. They offer more than 500 workshops annually, host art exhibits throughout Northern Vermont, and bring workshops to nursing homes, mental health centers, senior meal sites, adult day centers, and artists' homes. GRACE also partners with other organizations to help untaught artists develop their abilities to tell important stories of their lives.

CONNECTING VERMONT'S CREATIVE SECTOR

Vermont Creative Network, a project of the Vermont Arts Council, brings together arts advocates working at many levels to strengthen the capacity of the creative sector, increase opportunities for advancement and leverage, coordinate communication and planning, and provide opportunities for peer-to-peer learning and mentorship.

THEATER FOR AT-RISK YOUTH

Get Thee to the Funnery provides collaborative theater experiences for young Vermonters—including programs that focus on very-low-income and at-risk youth—by connecting the mind, heart, body, and voice through Shakespeare's works. The Funnery helps participants develop listening, teamwork, and physical abilities that grow their leadership and self-advocacy skills.



Arts Connects to:

- Working Families
- Mental Health
- Quality Education
- Aging Population
- Substance Abuse
- Workforce Skills





Giving Tip

Get involved

Volunteering is an excellent way to give while experiencing firsthand the impact an organization has in the community.

Giving Tip

Invest in leadership

Building the capacity of organizations to function professionally and effectively allows programs to flourish. The Community Foundation is actively involved with its donors to support capacity-building activities for the nonprofit community.

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It's in that spirit that the Vermont Community Foundation helps donors find and fund the causes they love, strengthens communities with grants and investments, and works with partners to find bold solutions to the most critical issues facing our state.

Join us.
We're better together.

To establish a fund, contribute to the Philanthropic Leadership Fund, or speak with one of our philanthropic advisors, please contact us.

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