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Capstone Community Action

I am here in support of the Vermont Everyone Eats FY24 request of 1.2 million dollars.

As you may know, Capstone works to improve the lives of Vermonters by providing opportunities, education, and the vital assistance needed to be self-sufficient. Our dedicated partner network is a key ingredient in this.

As a hub leader with the VEE program, we have worked with 16 restaurants to share over 400,000 meals via a network of 45 community partners in our service area of Lamoille, Orange, and Washington counties and nearby towns. This was critical support for at-risk Vermonters throughout the crisis response phase of the COVID-19 pandemic. Now we find ourselves in a unique moment. As the landscape of pandemic support shifts, we must be holistic and collaborative in our approach to continued recovery in our communities.

Capstone's Community Economic Development program's mission is to help low income communities thrive through small businesses, and includes financial coaching, tax support, and micro business development (celebrating its 30th year!) at its core. So much of Vermont is built on small businesses like those we support, many of them restaurants.

Less tangible than the economic dividends generated by local taxes and job creation is that restaurants are often the community hub of small and rural towns. What we know, and have solidified through VEE, is that the impact of a restaurant goes much further than basic economics. They have a deep community networking effect - contributing to a rich and diverse fabric of support. We're lucky to have them. This type of connectivity is crucial for resilient communities and amplifies the work that Capstone does every single day.

Harrys Hardware in Cabot shares meals powered by the Localvore app and our hub - partnered with Neighbors in Action in Cabot and a FQHC in Plainfield (The Health Center). From Plainfield, meals and grocery boxes are delivered to folks out of range of the usual services, many without reliable transportation or housing. How do we keep these connections strong and continue to expand that circle of support?

In response to the emergency version of VEE coming to an end, what I've heard most from restaurants is not "What about us?". It has been a resounding chorus of "How do we keep doing this, together?" and "We have to keep helping our community".

This investment would secure the dignified and intentional transition of VEE onward from acute crisis response and keep people employed in rural places. We have a distinct opportunity to bolster an established network of activated business owners, engaged community members, and organizational stakeholders primed to keep our rural regions on track to stabilize through recovery, towards resilience and thriving.

Thank you for your consideration of 1.2 million dollars for this crucial support.