

Economic Services Division (ESD) Department for Children and Families Agency of Human Services



**Providing a helping hand
to Vermonters in need.**



Economic Services Division (ESD)

ESD administers economic benefits that help Vermonters in need. Programs such as 3SquaresVT, Emergency/General Assistance, Fuel Assistance, and Reach Up provide a safety net for individuals and families who may be experiencing unemployment, underemployment, single parenthood, aging, disability, the death of a family member, or other life-changing events.

Populations Served

- ✓ Children & youth;
- ✓ Families with children;
- ✓ Seniors;
- ✓ People with physical disabilities; and
- ✓ Low- and moderate-income families and individuals.

ESD Organizational Structure

- The ESD Deputy Commissioner oversees 555 staff located:
 - In 12 district offices across the state;
 - At the Application & Document Processing Center (ADPC), ESD Call Center, and Business Application Support Unit (BASU); and
 - At our central office located temporarily in Essex Junction.

- Eligibility staff administer benefits for all financial programs:
 - 3SquaresVT (SNAP)
 - Essential Person
 - Fuel Assistance (LIHEAP)
 - General and Emergency Assistance (GA/EA)
 - Health Care
 - Reach Up (TANF)

District Offices

There are 12 ESD district offices across the State, co-located with other AHS district offices:

- ADO - St. Albans
- BDO – Burlington
- HDO - Hartford
- JDO – St. Johnsbury
- LDO – Brattleboro
- MDO - Barre
- NDO – Newport
- RDO – Rutland
- SDO - Springfield
- TDO – Bennington
- VDO – Morrisville
- YDO – Middlebury

Application & Document Processing Center

- The ADPC scans and indexes an average of 400,000 pieces of paper per month.
- This includes:
 - Applications; and
 - Supporting documents such as paystubs, tax returns, identification, correspondence, etc.
- In addition to processing all incoming mail for ESD statewide, the ADPC manages the process and sends out all reviews and interim reports.
- The average is 8,000 -10,000 mailed from the ADPC each month.



Business Application Support Unit (BASU)

- Staff in this unit are considered “super users”
- BASU staff support OnBase, the legacy ACCESS system and the new VHC system
- All “production” system issues and/or new IT projects are funneled through this unit



ESD's Call Center: 1-800-479-6151

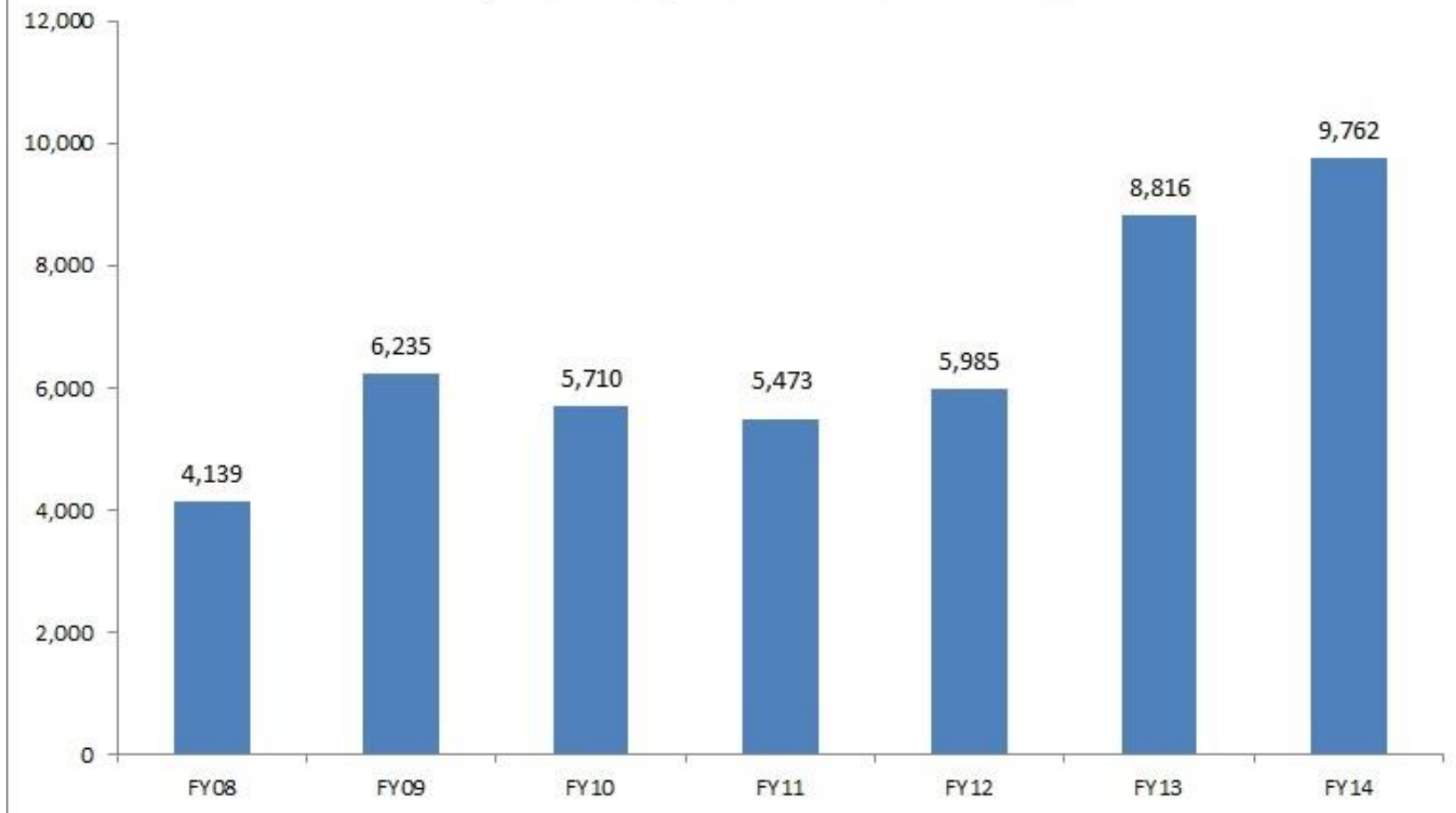


- 31 staff receive an average of 600 to 1,000 calls per day. July 1, 2013 - June 30th 2014 there were 200,000 calls to agents. The average talk time is 4-5 minutes per call. The average wait time is 4 minutes.
- Staff also receive about 30 calls a day from community partners and respond to 30 to 50 emails per month.
- Once clients have established accounts, they can use Interactive Voice Response (IVR) to get information about their benefits (24 hours a day, 7 days a week).
- Clients can also choose to speak with a customer service representative during regular business hours:
 - 7:45 am – 6:00 pm Monday - Thursday
 - 7:45 am – 4:30 pm Friday
- Staff are fully trained in program eligibility rules so they can resolve consumer issues without having to transfer calls to district offices

General /Emergency Assistance

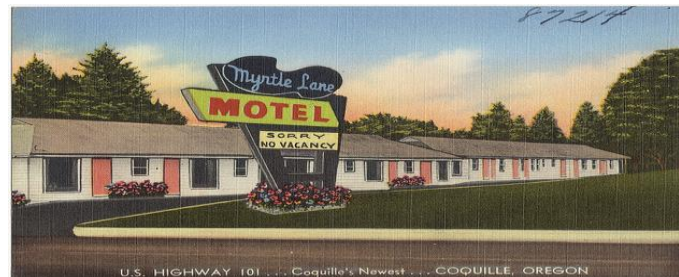
- GA and EA help eligible individuals and families meet their emergency basic needs. This may include help paying for:
 - Groceries;
 - Room & board;
 - Rent/security deposit;
 - Fuel, utilities, utility deposit, connect & reconnect fees, special trip charges;
 - Transportation,
 - Medical, dental, prescription, medical supplies/equipment; and
 - Burial costs.
- GA is funded from the State's general fund. EA is funded from the federal Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) block grant.
- Individuals and families may be eligible if they have an emergent need and do not have the income or resources to meet that need. They must show:
 - Their assets have been exhausted (with certain exceptions)
 - They have actively pursued all sources of potential income
 - Other criteria such as responsibility for dependent children, elderly, unable to work, or having barriers to employment according to GA/EA rules.

GA/EA Unduplicated Cases Served



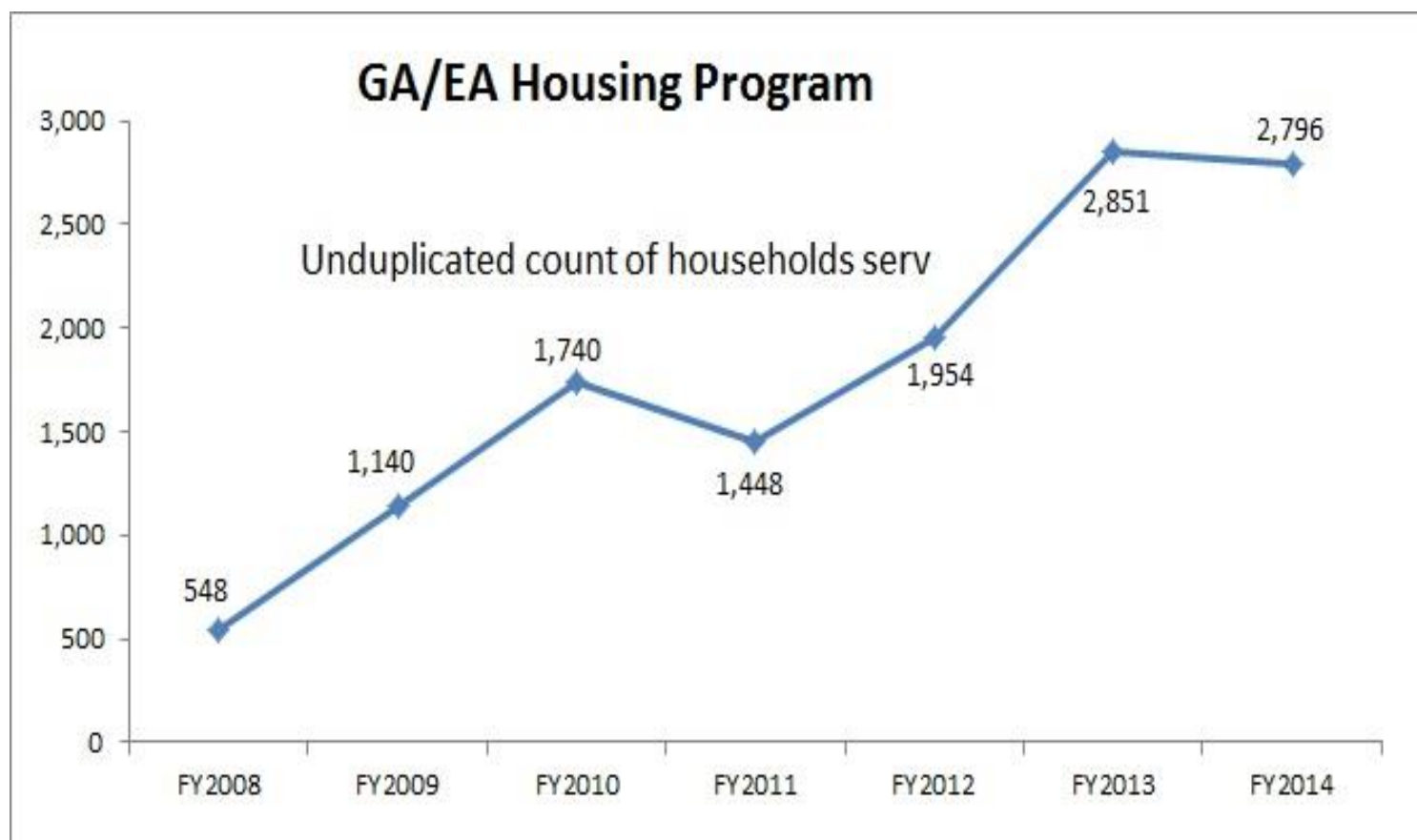
GA Temporary Housing

- Temporary housing, a large portion of the GA budget, is provided only if alternative arrangements (e.g., family, friends, shelter) are not immediately available.
- Eligibility is based on one of the following criteria:
 - Catastrophic (fire, flood, natural disaster, court-ordered or constructive eviction, domestic violence).
 - Vulnerable Population (65 years of age or older, receipt of SSI or SSDI, child six years of age or under, in the third trimester of pregnancy).



The number of unique households receiving GA/EA Housing Assistance decreased slightly in FY 2014, going from:

- 2,851 households served in FY 2013 to 2,796 in 2014.



GA Cold Weather Exception



- Eligibility for temporary shelter is relaxed when any of the following conditions exist (or are anticipated to exist) between 6pm and 6am – in the Vermont zip code where the homeless applicant is applying:
 - Temperatures or Wind Chill are less than 20 degrees (F)
 - Temperatures are less than 32 degrees (F) with a higher than 50% chance of precipitation reported.
- SFY2014: Actual Expenditure - \$3,195,117
- SFY2015 Budgeted for GA Temporary Housing: \$2.6 Million
- SFY2015 (through December 2014): GA Temporary Housing Authorized-\$1,530,282; Cold Weather Exception Housing Authorized - \$263,322
- Total: \$1,793,604

Cold Weather Analysis

COLD WEATHER EXCEPTION ANALYSIS FOR SFY14 & SFY15 THROUGH DECEMBER 31

<u>CWE Measure</u>	<u>SFY14</u>	<u>SFY15</u>	<u>Change</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
Nights Meeting Criteria*	55	41	-14	-25%
Requests for Emergency Housing	1756	2887	1131	64%
Number of Motel Nights	3388	3802	414	12%
Avg. Number Motel Rooms Per CWE Night	62	93	31	50%
Number of Adults	1859	3097	1238	67%
Number of Children	226	551	325	144%

*The first CWE night in SFY14 was 10/25/2013 and in SFY15 was 11/2/2014.

Vermont Rental Subsidy Program (VRS)

- State-funded short term (12 month) rental assistance program
- Clients are generally on Reach Up or SSI or have income less than 125% of FPL
- Subsidies provide support for up to one year while households work to increase their income or secure other long-term affordable housing.
- Participants pay 30% of their income towards rent; the State of Vermont pays the difference directly to landlords.
- VRS works closely with VSHA which provides VRS recipients with a preference on the Section 8 waiting list
- Case management is provided by local housing review teams which includes community partners, local ESD staff, Voc. Rehab, DOC, DV agencies, church representatives, etc.
- Housing review teams make all VRS referrals to central office and assign a case manager that follows/supports clients throughout their time on the program



Vermont Rental Subsidy Program (VRS)

- VRS began in December of 2011. In its first 18 months, VRS transitioned 111 low-income households, consisting of 325 persons, from homelessness to affordable housing.
- As of November 2014:
 - The average monthly rent paid by each household is \$265
 - The average monthly rent paid by ESD per household is \$580
 - 103 households are approved and leased up
 - 33 households are tentatively granted and seeking housing
 - 22 households are on the waiting list
- Vermont Rental Subsidy funding:
 - SFY14 - \$500,000
 - SFY15 - \$1,000,000

Vermont's Reach Up Program: TANF



- Congress created the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) block grant through the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996
- TANF replaced Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), which had provided cash welfare to poor families with children since 1935
- States receive a fixed block grant to fund their own welfare programs (FY 2014-VT received \$47.3 million). This funding is used in a number of ways: EITC, childcare, basic assistance, CCDF-Child Care Development Fund, SSBG-Social Services Block Grant, administration.
- States must also spend some of their own dollars on programs for needy families (Maintenance of Effort – MOE – requirement, Separate State Programs and Solely State Funded programs \$45.1 million). This funding is also utilized for basic assistance, child care, administration etc...

Related Programs

Reach First

Stabilizes families experiencing a short-term crisis by providing case management, financial assistance and support services within a four-month period.

Reach Ahead

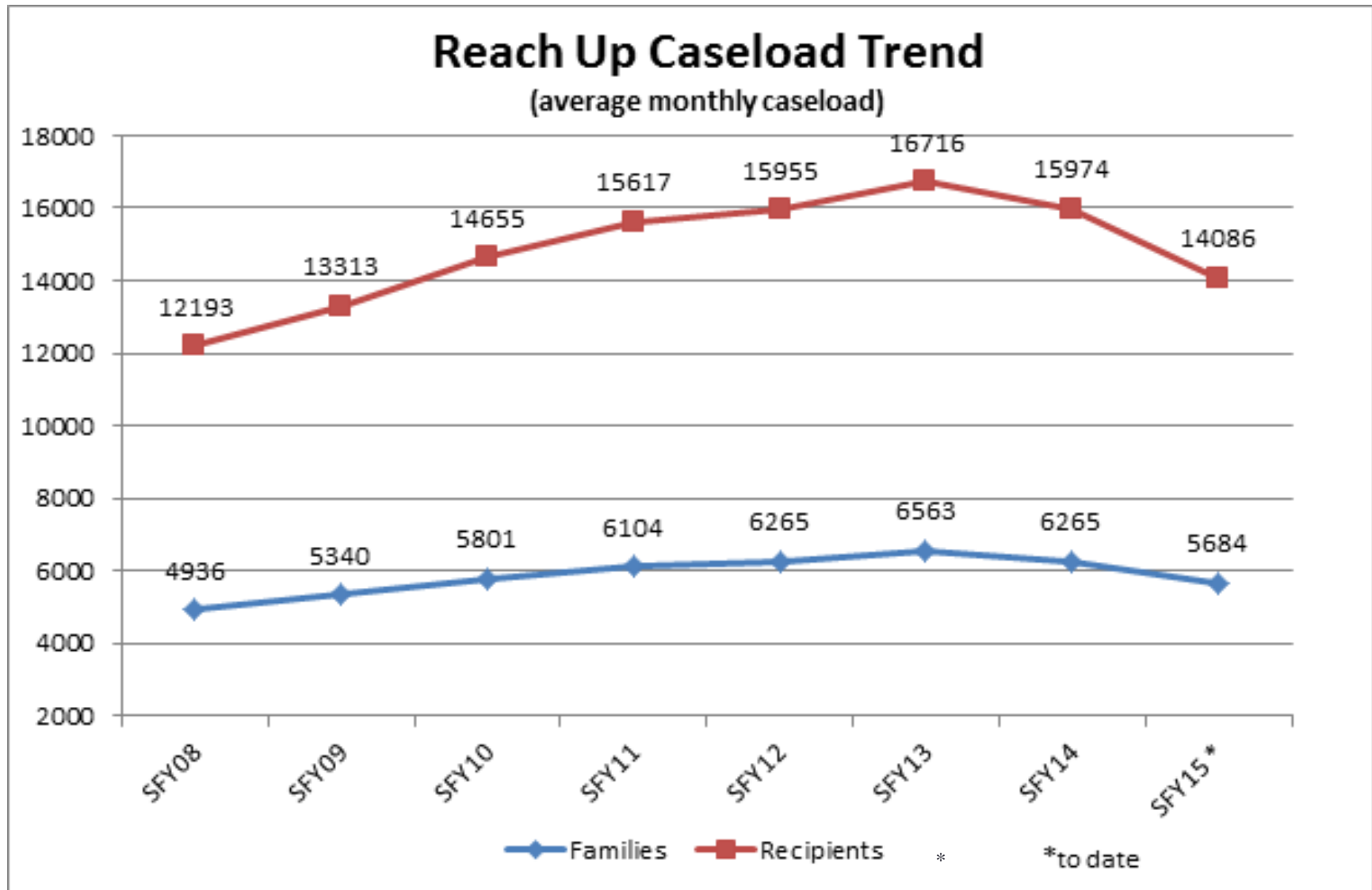
Promotes financial stability after families have transitioned off of Reach Up by providing a food benefit and support services for 12 months after a family has left Reach Up.

Postsecondary Education (PSE)

Assists parents in eligible low-income families to obtain two- or four-year postsecondary undergraduate degrees in fields directly related to employment.

Who is Eligible for Reach Up?

- States have broad discretion to determine eligibility for TANF benefits and services.
- Families must be financially needy and have a minor child to qualify for assistance; states determine the exact financial eligibility rules and benefit amounts.
 - The payment standard for a family of 3 living outside Chittenden county is \$640.
 - The payment standard for a family of 3 living inside Chittenden county is \$665.
- Key federal restrictions:
 - States cannot provide cash assistance from federal TANF funds for longer than 60 months to a family that includes an adult recipient
 - Legal immigrants are ineligible until they have been in the US for 5 years



Reach Up Work Requirements

- States must require recipients to engage in work activities and must impose sanctions (by reducing or terminating benefits) if an individual refuses to participate.
- States can set their own policies on who must participate in work activities and what an individual must do, but a state must meet the federal work participation rate or face fiscal penalties.
- Half of *all* families receiving TANF assistance must be engaged in a work activity for at least 30 hours a week (20 hours a week for single parents with young children).
- 90 percent of *two-parent* families must be engaged in work, generally for 35 hours per week.
- Families may receive a deferment from the work requirements for a number of reasons, including medical, caring for a young child, needed in the home etc...



Reach Up Non-Compliance and Sanctions

If a participating adult does not fully comply with the FDP or work requirement without good cause, the family's Reach Up grant will be reduced (sanctioned) or closed.

- For the first 3 months of noncompliance the grant is reduced by \$75.
- After 3 months, the grant is reduced by \$150.
- For a family that has received over 60 months of assistance and is not in compliance, the grant will be closed. The family may re-apply after a two month penalty period.



Reach Up Time Limits

- As of May 1, 2014, families that received 60 countable months or more of Reach Up benefits are no longer eligible for benefits unless:
 - The participating adult is deferred from his/her work requirement;
 - The participating adult is engaged in community service employment; or
 - The participating adult is employed and meeting his/her work requirement.
- ESD will be submitting a report on 2/15/15 that focuses on the impact of this requirement.



Reach Up Partnerships

- Creative Workforce Solutions (CWS)-Vocational Rehabilitation, Vermont Adult Learning (VAL) and Vermont Association of Business Industry and Rehabilitation (VABIR)
- Parent Child Centers
- VRRP-Vermont Refugee Resettlement Program and AALV- Association for Africans Living in Vermont
- Housing
- Transportation Brokers
- DMH and ADAP collaborative for substance abuse and mental health case management and clinical services for Reach Up participants.
- Substance abuse residential treatment for women and their children-Lund



Reach Up Highlights

- **Reach Ahead-** Reach Ahead benefits will be extended for an additional 12 months to allow a participant to receive a total of 24 months of support services, including 100% child care subsidy.
- **180 day Temporary Absence Rule-**The rule allows benefits to remain open if a parent must be out of the home to address substance abuse, mental health issues, or is hospitalized; when children are absent for the same reason; or if they are placed in DCF custody. The rule's intent is to improve family stability to increase the family's chances of successful reunification.
- **Medical Review Team-**a medical review process to independently review requests for medical deferments from work activities, if the physician determined that the medical condition would last longer than 60 days.
- **Substance Abuse/ Mental Health Initiative-**The Reach Up program, in partnership with the Department of Mental Health (DMH) and the Department of Health's Alcohol and Drug Abuse Program (ADAP), is providing mental health and substance abuse services to address employment barriers and family well-being for Reach Up participants.

Seasonal Fuel Assistance



- Helps lower-income Vermonters to heat their homes by paying part of their home heating bills.
- Benefits are granted if the client is income eligible (185% of the Federal Poverty Level). Example: maximum income for a 3-person household is \$3,053/month
- Applications are processed year-round (approx. 48,000/year)
- Grants are made from late September (firewood/pellets) through mid-March (all fuels)
- 25,000+/- households are projected to receive a benefit in FFY2015
- Average FFY2015 “full-season, full-fuel-liability” benefit projected at \$783
- Federal Requirement: Benefits based on client “*need*” (financial need and energy burden)
- “Heat-&-Eat” – annual \$21 fuel benefit to 24,000+/- households leverages additional 3SquaresVT benefits
- www.dcf.vermont.gov/esd/fuel_assistance

Crisis Fuel Assistance



- Applications are processed by Vermont's five Community Action Agencies
- Income limits: 200% of FPL. Example: the maximum income for a 3-person household is \$3,300/month. In addition to being income eligible, the household must also be experiencing a crisis
- One grant per season for households with incomes to 185% FPL; two grants for households between 186% and 200% of FPL
- Clients receiving Seasonal Fuel can also receive Crisis Fuel
- Crisis season: last Monday in November to the last business day in April or until funds run out
- After-hours help is available statewide (8:30am to 4:00pm) on Saturdays, Sundays and state holidays for households with "vulnerable" members (age 60 or older, living with a disability, or under the age of 6) by calling 1-800-479-6151
- Approximately 6,000 households are projected to be assisted in FFY2015
- www.dcf.vermont.gov/esd/fuel_assistance/crisis_assistance

Fuel Program Funding (Seasonal & Crisis)

- FFY2013: \$18.4 million (Federal) + \$9.7 million (State) = \$28.1 million Avg. Benefit \$898
- FFY2014: \$19.1 million (Federal) + \$8.1 million (State) = \$27.2 million Avg. Benefit \$792
- FFY2015: \$18.8 million (Federal) + \$5.0 million (State) = \$23.8 million Avg. Benefit \$783

Contact:

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Fuel & Utility Programs Director

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Utility Assistance Programs

- Benefits privately funded by GMP & VGS rate-payers.
- DCF/ESD/Fuel & Utility Office determines eligibility under service contracts with GMP and VGS.
- Green Mountain Power (GMP) 25% discount first 600 KWH; 150% federal poverty maximum.
- Vermont Gas Systems (VGS) 20% discount on entire bill; 185% federal poverty maximum.
- **To be eligible for Energy Assistance you must:**
 - Be a residential customer of Green Mountain Power
 - Your total gross monthly household income is not more than:
 - 1 person \$1,459
 - 2 persons \$1,966
 - 3 persons \$2,474
 - For each additional person add \$508
- Applications received between October 1, 2014 and December 31, 2014, AND have never been on GMP's EAP AND are found eligible may have the GMP account arrears forgiven in addition to receiving the discount every month.
- Applications received prior to October 1, 2014 or after December 31, 2014 will not be eligible for arrears forgiveness but will be reviewed for the discount.
- Residential service only regardless of heat source.
- Website: www.dcf.vermont.gov/esd/eap

3SquaresVT – (SNAP)

Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Programs

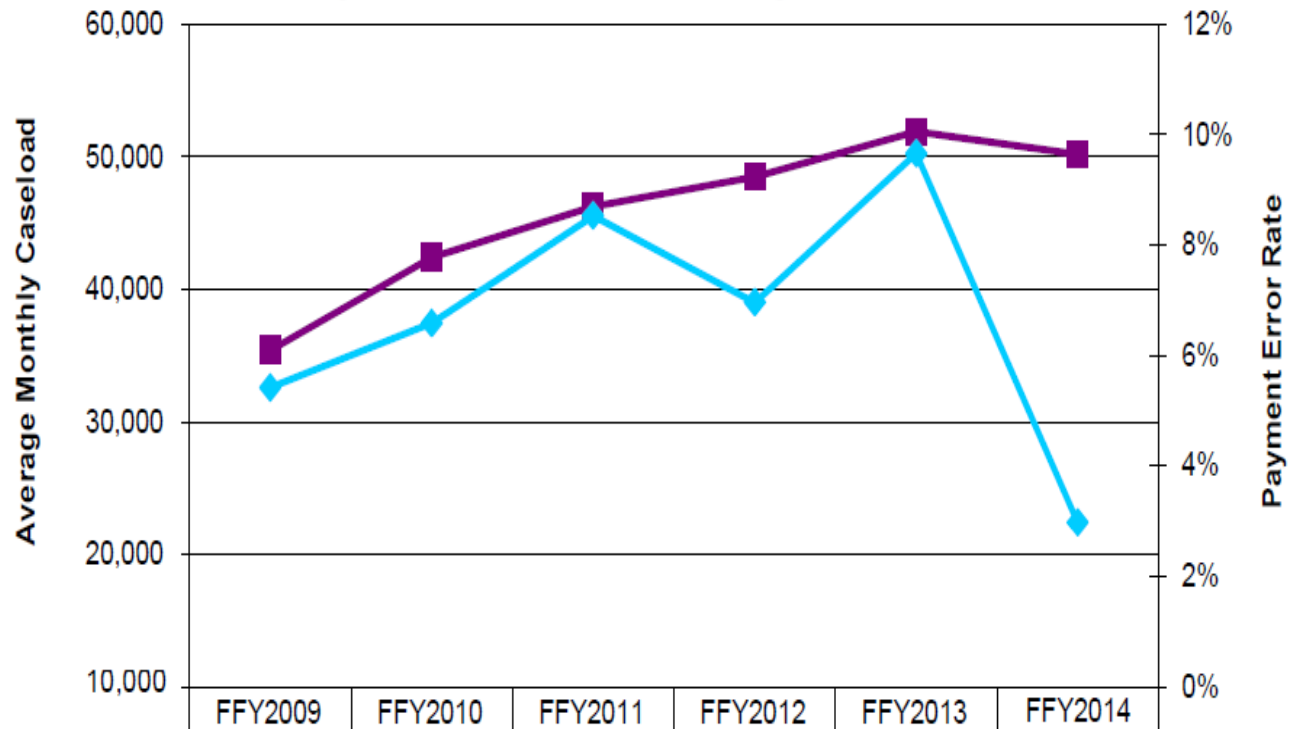
- 3SquaresVT is a federal USDA program that helps eligible Vermonters to stretch their food budgets and put three healthy meals on their tables every day
- At the national level, the program is called the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program or SNAP
- SNAP is the largest program in the domestic hunger safety net
- ESD works with community partners such as Community Action Agencies, Area Agencies on Aging, the Vermont Food bank, Hunger Free Vermont, and others to reach out to Vermonters who are eligible for 3SquaresVT and ensure they can access benefits



3SquaresVT Caseload & Payment Error Rate

- The USDA requires states to achieve a minimum accuracy rate of 94% when issuing benefits – or face penalties. This means the percentage of total recipients who were either under or over paid must be below 6% to be in compliance.
- Vermont failed to meet this standard for three years in a row: from FFY 2011 to FFY 2013 when it stood at a high of 9.66%
- This rate dropped to 2.98% in FFY 2014 (October – June 2014), ranking Vermont first in the nation for most-improved payment error rate
- Several initiatives contributed to this dramatic turnaround:
 - Adding new eligibility workers;
 - Addressing workflow and procedural issues through a business improvement process;
 - Implementing new quality control procedures;
 - Delivering intensive staff trainings to eligibility workers, supervisors, and managers;
 - Restoring ESD's training unit;
 - Consulting with national experts around best practices; and
 - Moved to a district based caseload

3SquaresVT Caseload and Payment Error Rate



■ Average Monthly Caseload	35,408	42,435	46,239	48,480	51,883	50,199
◆ Payment Error Rate	5.42%	6.59%	8.53%	6.96%	9.66%	2.98%

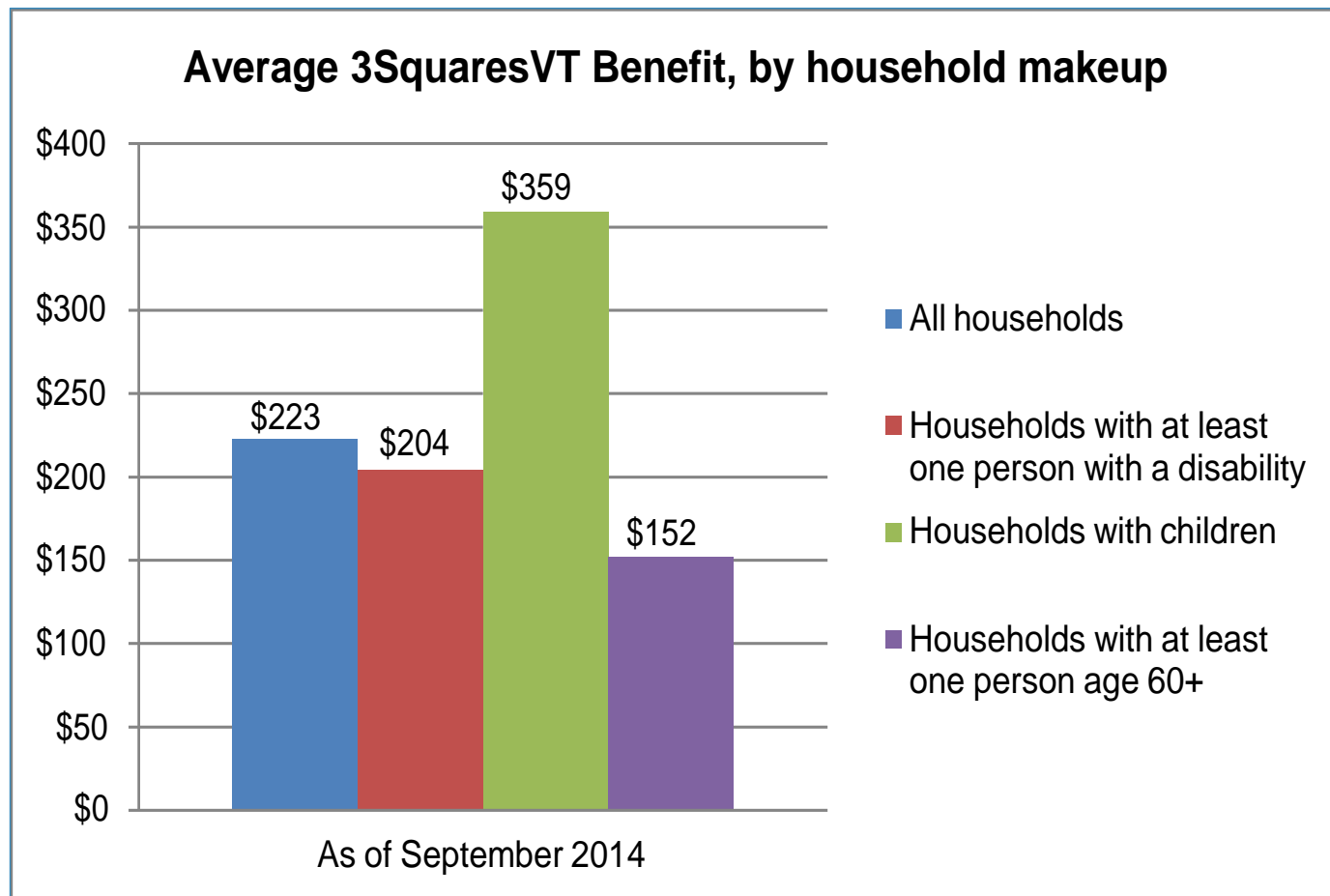
■ Average Monthly Caseload
 ◆ Payment Error Rate

* The payment error rate for FFY 2014 is based on 8 months of data.

One-Month Snapshot of 3SquaresVT Participants

One-Month Snapshot of 3SquaresVT Participants	
Data for the Month of September 2014	
Total Recipients	87,525
- Recipients aged 0-17	31,052 (35.5%)
- Recipients with a disability	23,112 (26.4%)
- Recipients aged 60 or older	13,564 (15.5%)
Total Participating Households	45,711
- Households with children aged 0-17	16,331 (35.7%)
- Households with at least one person with a disability	21,695 (47.5%)
- Households with at least one person aged 60+	12,208 (26.7%)

2014 Average 3SquaresVT Benefit





Vermont Farm to Family Program

- Helps income-eligible Vermonters to buy locally-grown fresh fruits and vegetables at participating farmers' markets
- About one in four Vermonters qualifies for Farm To Family coupons
- Coupon distribution begins in June and ends September 30th or sooner if all coupons are distributed. Coupons expire October 31
- Eligible applicants get one \$30 book of coupons per year. The program was not created to supplement incomes but rather to change food shopping and eating habits and build the consumer base for local farmers markets
- Vermont distributes four blocks of coupons each year:
 - Participants in the Ladies First Program
 - Participants in the WIC Program
 - Income-eligible households that include someone age 60 or older
 - Other low-income households

Health Care Eligibility



- ESD's Health Access Eligibility Unit processes eligibility and enrollment for over 200,000 Vermonters in the following programs:
 - Medicaid for Children and Adults
 - Medicaid for Aged, Blind and Disabled
 - VPharm
 - Healthy Vermonters
 - Qualified Health Plans
(Federal and State premium assistance and cost sharing)
- ESD's Long Term Care Unit processes eligibility and enrollment for approximately 6,300 Vermonters for Long Term Care Medicaid.