

**CHILD POVERTY COUNCIL
THURSDAY, OCTOBER 20, 2016
EILEEN NOONEY, DIRECTOR
FAMILY AND COMMUNITY SUPPORT SERVICES**

For over 50 years community action agencies like Capstone Community Action have worked closely with states and municipalities to combat the effects of poverty in their communities. Part of our stated mission is to “**alleviate the suffering** caused by poverty, and to work with individuals and families **to move out of poverty,**” both tall orders in a complicated world.

Our agency has 5 locations, covers three counties and has 162 employees. Several Capstone programs, including its Transportation Project, operate on a statewide basis. We work closely with participants in crisis and our programs are designed to assist people as they move up the economic ladder. Most consumers come through our door for the first time for help with an emergency, such as loss of housing, inability to heat their home, or lack of food. Our Food Shelf in Barre fed 5731 people last year, and our Weatherization program made significant upgrades to 419 homes. Seventy-two households were moved from homelessness to reliable housing. Our Energy Specialists across all our locations made 1071 separate assists for emergency fuel. Our Randolph office houses one of the premier VT Health Connect Navigators who covers our service area recruiting and enrolling Vermonters in health care plans. 1700 children served by 170 daycare providers obtained access to more nutritious food. 1070 tax returns were prepared at no charge by IRS trained volunteers. Thirty-six families were screened to participate in supervised visits with their non-custodial children.

Our 16/17 Reach Up Housing grant states a caseload goal of 12 Reach Up families for a half time position. Our housing counselor now has 36 families in varying stages of housing trouble on their caseload.

Transportation continues to be one of the single biggest barriers to self sufficiency faced by Reach Up families, scoring #1 or #2 in surveys identifying these barriers. Vermont’s rural nature, tough climate and substandard roads create the perfect storm for car owners regardless of their economic status but no population suffers more than the low income family. Strict inspection laws governing emissions systems and the like present a new obstacle for these households. Driver’s license issues and fines can be insurmountable to the working poor, resulting in a high rate of uninsured drivers driving substandard or unsafe cars. New schemes from unscrupulous dealers or lending institutions trap many families in unsustainable loans, resulting in repossession and long term credit problems.

Since “welfare as we know it” was rewritten in 1996, Capstone has been on the leading edge of transportation programs for Vermont’s working families. For 12 years we operated a donated car garage in Central Vermont. Since closing that facility in 2008 Capstone has worked closely with Reach Up administration to address this pressing need. In 2010 Capstone, Reach Up and the Good News Garage collaborated to redesign the transportation process. A system of educational workshops was created to help participants accurately assess their needs and estimate their costs. The workshops include a budgeting exercise and a tool to estimate annual mileage (attached), both designed to develop families’ skills in order to support a car long term.

Capstone transportation staff has been on the Governor’s Pathways from Poverty Council since 2014. The Council’s work did result in programs that assisted hundreds of unlicensed drivers getting their driving privileges back but there is still work to be done. Workshop facilitators use the setting to make people aware of these programs.

Capstone’s transportation grant was reduced by over 30%, from \$92,000 in 2012, to \$60,000 in 2013 and has been level funded since then. As a result the frequency of workshops in some districts has been cut by as much as 60%. A Reach Up participant needing transportation could meet with their case manager the day after a workshop was held and have as much as a 10 week wait for the next one, depending on the district. In its last grant year our Transportation Project performed 64 transportation workshops attended by 186 Reach Up clients, reviewed 118 estimates for Reach Up case managers, and worked closely with the Good News Garage to help people qualify for transportation assistance. While it’s great that 60 families received a car through this process, that means only a small percentage of families got on the road.

In every study of rural transportation needs private cars are proven to be the most efficient form of transportation. However, without additional resources many families will remain mired in poverty, literally unable to move forward. The Pathways from Poverty Council has recommended the legislature request a comprehensive transportation study to identify the issues faced by Vermonters across all economic levels. Without that information it will be impossible to address this critical issue in a thoughtful manner. While there is not a “one size fits all” solution to this problem, clearly the piecemeal solutions are not adequate for many Vermont residents.

CAPSTONE BY THE NUMBERS
July 1, 2015-June 30, 2016
(All Departments)

- Over 5,700 people accessed emergency food.
- Over 1,000 households received home heating fuel.
- 72 families avoided homelessness.
- 500 children accessed early education and developmental services through Head Start and Early Head Start.
- 419 benefitted from weatherized homes saving money and staying warm.
- 1,700 children are fed nutritious meals while in child care.
- 64 transportation workshops were held for 186 Reach Up participants.
- 225 auto repair estimates were reviewed for Reach Up or VR consumers.
- 51 people obtained reliable transportation to secure and maintain employment.
- 321 people gained financial literacy skills and saved money to purchase an asset.
- 1,070 had their taxes prepared and filed by IRS certified volunteer tax preparers bringing \$2.1 million back into the local economy.
- 22 unemployed or underemployed workers gained skills they needed to secure jobs in Vermont's food industry sector.
- 624 received information and assistance from our Health Navigator to access insurance.
- 36 families struggling with child custody issues participated in Supervised Visitation programs, allowing them contact with their non-custodial children.