



Vermont Community Action Agencies Programs and Services January 2019

General Overview

Since their inception as a part of the national War on Poverty in 1965, the five Vermont Community Action Agencies (CAAs) have collectively covered the entire state with their broad array of programs and services designed to help Vermonters with low income cope with the hardships of poverty, stabilize their financial condition, and move in the direction of becoming increasingly self-sufficient. Every year, these programs have a significant and positive impact on the lives of tens of thousands of low-income individuals (as many as **64,500**), who achieved as many as **120,600** distinct outcomes addressing the causes and conditions of poverty as a result of the services they received. Every dollar the VT CAAs receive from the state leverages as much as **\$2.35** from federal, local, private, and in-kind resources. These programs address a full spectrum of needs and can generally be organized into 4 major service categories: Crisis Intervention, Stabilization, Education / Training / Transition / Self Sufficiency, and Health & Nutrition.

Crisis Intervention Services

Housing Assistance – Housing counselors and case managers work with at-risk households to stabilize their housing, prevent homelessness, obtain housing if already homeless, and by whatever means necessary help them secure safe, decent, affordable and sustainable housing. That may include financial assistance to help with rental or mortgage arrears or security deposits and referrals to, and coordination with other resources and services to help households avoid falling behind in the future.

Housing Opportunity Program (HOP) – HOP's primary objectives are:

- **Homelessness Prevention** – To prevent individuals and families from becoming homeless and help them regain stability in their current housing or other permanent housing. Services include housing relocation and stabilizations services including short-term financial assistance and/or rental assistance for up to 12 months, including back rent.
- **Rapid Re-housing** – To help individuals and families living in shelters, publicly-funded motels, or places not meant for human habitation to move as quickly as possible into permanent housing and achieve stability in that housing, providing services similar to those used for homelessness prevention.
- **Housing Case Management** – To provide intensive & comprehensive support and intervention, and service coordination for homeless individuals and families who may be unlikely to resolve their housing crisis with short-term financial assistance alone.

Emergency Shelters – The VT CAAs employ a variety of strategies, customized to local circumstances, to enable the provision of emergency shelter for homeless individuals & families and those experiencing no-heat situations:

- **Jen's Motel** – Provides several thousand bed nights per year for a diverse group of individuals, including children, veterans, seniors, the chronically homeless, domestic violence survivors and people with disabilities
- **Extreme Cold Weather Emergency Shelters**
- **Operation, Fiscal Sponsorship and/or Grant Management of local Warming Shelters**

Voices Against Violence / Laurie's House –Crisis intervention, support and advocacy services to victims / survivors of domestic and sexual violence, including shelter, transitional housing, legal assistance, education, and supervised visitation, all at no cost and completely confidential.

Emergency Fuel & Utility Assistance (Crisis Fuel Assistance) –Crisis assistance to households with low income who are out of fuel or in danger of running out of fuel to heat their homes, or have received a disconnect notice from the utility company. This program helps homeowners, or renters who pay for heat or who have heat included in their rent, with:

- Purchasing their primary source of heat (oil, natural or propane gas, wood, electric)
- Avoiding disconnect of electric service
- Referrals to and assistance with expedited applications for the Vermont Seasonal Fuel Assistance Program

WARMTH –Assistance to pay fuel and utility bills and support services to households facing a home heating crisis, in partnership with Green Mountain Power and other participating fuel suppliers, utilities and private donations. The program is intended to supplement and extend available resources by assisting households who are ineligible for federal / state-funded Crisis Fuel Assistance and for eligible households before and after the Crisis Fuel program season and when they run out of their Crisis Fuel allocation.

Heating System Repair & Replacement – For homeowners, repairs or replaces heating systems that are inoperable or unsafe to operate, to enable Vermonters to heat their homes safely and ensure a healthy home environment.

Food Shelves – While there are differences from agency to agency based on local needs and circumstances, groceries, hot meals, home delivery, education and/or nutritional services are often provided to help address food insecurity and hunger that face Vermonters with low income.

Stabilization Services

Weatherization Assistance Program – Provides home energy audits and a full spectrum of energy conservation and health & safety improvements at no cost to low-income households, including;

- An energy audit to identify potential improvements in energy efficiency, comfort, and ways to save money on fuel bills
- A check-up on heating systems to ensure they're operating in a safe, healthy, and efficient manner, and repair or replacement of systems that are unsafe, , unhealthy, malfunctioning or grossly inefficient.
- Where applicable, free lighting & appliance upgrades through a partnership with Efficiency Vermont.
- Minor home repairs, and in some cases where applicable, remediation of harmful substances (e.g., asbestos-laded Vermiculite) to enable Weatherization services to be provided

3E Thermal – Works statewide with all the VT CAAs and Weatherization Assistance Programs to provide technical support and cash incentives to help building owners make comprehensive energy efficiency improvements in affordable multifamily housing, thus enabling them to remain affordable.

Home Repair Program – Home repairs to ensure safe, healthy, comfortable, affordable, accessible, and energy-efficient homes for Vermonters with low income.

Vermont Tenants – Information and referral services directly to tenants via phone and face-to-face tenant counseling, and custom designs and conducts workshops on residential rental housing laws, codes and code enforcement to meet the particular needs of participating groups.

Fair Housing Project (FHP) – Training, education, and information & referral services on fair housing rights & responsibilities. In collaboration with organizations such as the Vermont Human Rights Commission, Regional Planning Commissions and Vermont Legal Aid, FHP works to eradicate illegal housing discrimination in Vermont, through a wide range of services ranging from individual assistance with fair housing issues to workshops for municipal planners and zoning administrators.

Mobile Home Program (MHP) – Assists individual Vermont mobile home park residents and their associations & cooperatives to have greater control over their housing, defend their interests, protect their housing rights, improve their living conditions, and ensure that they are able to keep their mobile homes safe and affordable. MHP achieves those goals through housing counseling, referral services, advocacy, education and resident organizing.

Thrift Stores – Low- or (for those in crisis) no-cost clothing, furniture, and household goods to meet basic needs for low and moderate income households, and job training and work experience opportunities for individuals with disabilities and other significant and persistent barriers to employment.

Transportation Project – Through workshops held around the state, helps Reach Up and VocRehab participants deal with major car repairs, budget and save for vehicle ownership, resolve credit issues, assess a car's value, find and purchase a good quality car, and/or estimate annual vehicle operating costs.

Community Justice Programs – A wide range of services provided by multiple VT CAAs, in partnership with the Dept. of Corrections, to assist offenders and ex-offenders to avoid imprisonment, achieve rehabilitation, and/or enable a successful re-entry into the community. These include: Court Diversion, Prevention through Intervention, Restorative Justice, and Transitional Housing.

Education / Training / Transition / Self Sufficiency Programs

Head Start – Head Start (for preschoolers) and Early Head Start (for children up to age 3), a federally-funded child and family development program, provides comprehensive education and developmental services for pregnant women, children from birth to five, and their families. Services for children enable healthy development and school readiness, and include early education, physical & mental health, nutrition, and services for children with special needs. Services for parents promote family engagement, and include parenting education, leadership, social services and family supports.

Parent Child Centers – Help families make sure children get off to a healthy start. Services include almost anything that families need: Early childhood services, home visits for families with young children, playgroups, parent education & support, and information & referral.

Youth Services – A wide range of services to assist at-risk youth and youth in transition to enhance their skills, resolve barriers, and provide opportunities to enable them to achieve their goals.

- **Community Action Youth Services (CAYS)** – Wraparound services to help youth achieve a successful and fulfilling adulthood, including crisis intervention, basic needs (housing, food), education (tutoring, GED programs), employment, and mentoring.
- **Crisis Youth Services / Runaway Program** – Intervention for 12-18-year-olds in crisis and their families, which may include short-term alternative living arrangements and individual and family counseling.
- **Teen Center** – A safe destination for youth to get help in their daily lives, a hot meal, and a supportive environment where they can find people who will listen.
- **Transition Services** – Life skills instruction, individually and in group settings, support services, and safe housing placements for youth who are transitioning from foster care, homeless, or without the support of their legal guardian.
- **Another Chance** – High School Graduation and GED support for pregnant and parenting teens and young adults.

Micro Business Development – Training, technical assistance, counseling, support, and access to capital for low-to-moderate-income Vermonters who are planning to start or expand a small business. The program specializes in working with low-income entrepreneurs with significant barriers to achieving success, such as disabilities, bad credit, and/or very limited income and resources.

Workforce Development / Training Initiatives – The VT CAAs offer a number of workforce initiatives that address persistent barriers to employment faced by disadvantaged workers with no, little, or unsuccessful work experiences, and who need customized and comprehensive training and services to overcome those obstacles, such as job readiness programs (e.g., “Ready for Work” and “Transitional Training”) that help a wide range of groups, including at-risk youth to obtain their first jobs, Reach Up participants to get real world work experience, and incarcerated individuals to gain core life & workplace skills to enter the workforce when they’re released.

Vermont Matched Savings Program / SaVermont – A matched savings and financial education program that helps low-income Vermonters invest in their future by enabling them to build financial assets. Matched by state funds, participants save – and have their savings matched – to purchase or repair a home, invest in training or post-secondary education, start or grow a business, or purchase or repair a vehicle.

Financial Capability – Helps low-income residents overcome barriers to financial security through education and coaching services designed to empower people to stabilize their finances, set goals and work to achieve them, and sustain successful financial behaviors over time. The knowledge and skills gained enables them to better manage their scarce resources, repair or build credit, and establish or strengthen connections to financial institutions.

Volunteer Income Tax Assistance Program (VITA) – Free tax preparation, provided by well-trained, IRS-certified volunteers, for anyone with low income, people with disabilities, the elderly, and limited English speaking taxpayers who need assistance preparing their tax returns, enabling them to receive refunds and tax credits for which they are eligible, and thereby bringing millions of dollars back into the state and local economies and stabilizing low-income Vermont households.

Community Kitchen Academy – A culinary arts job training program operated by several VT CAAs in partnership with the Vermont Foodbank, in which professional chefs deliver a proven curriculum – and 9 college credits – for unemployed and underemployed Vermonters to give them marketable skills that prepare them for sustainable careers in the food service industry and help break the cycle of poverty.

Health & Nutrition

Health Navigators – Helps Vermonters navigate the confusing options provided by the Vermont Health Connect Exchange to enable them to find and sign up for the best health insurance coverage for their needs, budgets and circumstances, and to make required changes when their situation changes.

3SquaresVT Outreach – 3SquaresVT (the USDA-funded program also known as Food Stamps and SNAP) helps Vermonters stretch their food budgets to ensure an adequate and nutritious diet for themselves and their families, and thereby maintain and enhance their health. The VT CAAs conduct outreach to inform and encourage eligible individuals to apply and assist them to complete and submit the application.

Coordination for Children’s Integrated Services – Children’s Integrated Services (CIS) offers early intervention, family support and prevention services that help ensure the healthy development and well-being of children, from pre-birth to age 5, and all available to families at low or no cost. The CIS Coordinators: 1) Provide leadership to the regional CIS system of care in all aspects of systems development, service delivery, professional development, financing, data collection and evaluation for the CIS array of services, with the goal of supporting families in accessing needed services in a coordinated and integrated manner; and 2) Serve as liaisons between the Dept. of Children and Family’s Child Development Division and the six regional CIS service providers and teams.

Child Care Food Program – Enables participating childcare and preschool program providers to serve children in their care nutritious meals and snacks that meet minimum daily requirements, and to provide nutrition education.

Farm-to-Family Coupons (aka Farmer’s Market Coupons) – Distributed by the VT CAAs to enable senior citizens and other individuals to purchase fresh, locally grown produce at participating farmer’s markets around Vermont.