



Volunteer Income Tax Assistance-VITA

About VITA

The Volunteer Income Tax Assistance Program, known as VITA (Vye-Ta) is a national free tax preparation and filing program for low income families to file income taxes, access their Earned Income and Child Tax credits, apply for renter's credits, or file their property tax adjustment claims. Any person or family who makes \$57,000 or less can qualify for this free service. The Community Action Agencies around Vermont offer VITA programs in varying capacities due to limited funding from the IRS. Typically, the IRS funds between 5% and 25% of the total cost to run the program (\$3,000-\$30,000 per agency depending on the number of tax returns prepared in the previous season) and the hosting site cover the remaining costs with discretionary dollars. In Vermont, there is only one full time Program Coordinator who works year-round to address common tax problems related to rejected tax returns, advanced child tax, property tax adjustment issues, and complicated letters from the IRS.

VITA by the Numbers for 2021* Tax Season

*most recent numbers collected December 2021

- **9** sites operated by the Community Action Network
- **4174** tax returns e-filed by volunteers
- **247** Schedule Cs prepared for micro businesses
- **\$5,601,973** in tax refunds
- **\$1,173,243** in Earned Income Tax Credits back to our communities
- **\$768,432** in Child Tax Credits for our families
- **\$1,093,643** in Covid Recovery Credit
- **\$17,952** average Adjusted Gross Income
- **1720** tax filers age 60+

Call to Action

To file more than 8,000 returns for low-income Vermonters, the Vermont Community Action Partnership requests \$400,000 (valued at \$50 a return) to employ 5 full-time VITA Tax Coordinators (\$80,000 for salary, fringe, indirect, occupancy, technology) located at each of the 5 Community Action Agencies to provide year-round professional tax services to income eligible Vermonters.

In tax season 2021, the Community Action Partnership managed 9 statewide sites. While the program relies on volunteers to answer phones, schedule appointments, and prepare and file taxes, each agency requires a professional paid coordinator to recruit, train, schedule and supervise the volunteers. Additionally, there are paid site coordinators who manage other sites within an agency's VITA program. Over 200 volunteers are necessary to help run a successful VITA initiative in Vermont that reaches every corner of our state. Certain areas of the state, particularly the Northeast Kingdom and southwest Vermont, have been un-served or underserved due to lack of funding. With limited resources, we have been able to support only 1 full time program and 3 part time programs. ***With full funding, we could reach twice as many low income Vermonters, saving them a minimum of \$125 for a simple return prepared by a for-profit tax preparation firm.***



Volunteer Income Tax Assistance-VITA

VITA during the Covid-19 Pandemic

When the pandemic closed down businesses and schools in March 2020, our VITA program was in full swing. Rather than turn people down who were relying on our program to help them file their taxes and access their credits and refunds, we quickly transitioned to remote filing. When the IRS extended their deadline by two months, we extended our program. Thousands of Vermonters relied on our VITA program during a time of great uncertainty and we invested in our staff to provide tax support for the remainder of the calendar year. With the extra stimulus dollars, the Advanced Child Tax Credit, and unemployment insurance, our one full-time VITA program coordinator has been fielding calls and assisting clients who otherwise would have no advocate to help them navigate the complexities of the tax system. In 2022, as the pandemic continues to affect our lives, our VITA program continues to provide critical tax preparation services to individuals, families and small businesses (with simple Schedule Cs) to ensure they file on time and accurately. Every year there are changes to the tax codes, updates or changes to the tax preparation software, and extensive trainings required to manage a successful VITA program. And, after the tax filing deadline, there are hundreds more low-income Vermonters who filed extensions, missed the deadline, or received a confusing letter and need professional assistance to help them navigate the IRS. **By providing funding \$400,000 (\$80,000/agency) to support a full time VITA program coordinator in every Community Action Agency in Vermont, all income eligible Vermonters will have access to quality tax preparation and year-round tax guidance from an IRS certified and trained Program Coordinator.**

Real People, Real Stories

in 2020, at the start of the pandemic, Maureen was 90 years old and living on her own with no family nearby to assist her. When she received a check from the IRS for \$10,000, she knew something wasn't right so she reached out to her trusted VITA site for help. Laura Sudhoff, the state's only full time tax program coordinator available to assist Maureen, learned that someone had used Maureen's address to file taxes fraudulently. Laura helped her navigate the IRS, which included steps to protect her social security number and return the check. However, the story didn't end there. Maureen soon began to receive threatening letters from the IRS claiming that she owed them the \$10,000. The stress on Maureen, who had recently lost her husband, was clear to Laura who had by now spent several months helping Maureen with this problem. Laura knew it was time to take this to the next level and reached out to Vermont's Taxpayer Advocate to request additional assistance.

Fast forward two years and the problem has not been entirely resolved but the demand for payment letters from the IRS have finally stopped coming. Throughout this process Laura has been by Maureen's side, helping her navigate the complexities of the IRS. And, as the tax program is in full swing for 2022, Laura is currently helping Maureen find a resource to fix her handicapped accessible ramp that she uses to walk from her car to her front door. ***Laura and the tax program exemplify the Action in Community Action!***

Please support funding \$400,000 for 5 full-time VITA Program Coordinators, 1 at each of the 5 Community Action Agencies, so that more low income Vermonters like Maureen can count on assistance with their taxes year-round.

Jan F. Demers
140 Loomis Street, Burlington, VT 05401
demers.jan@gmail.com

House and Senate Appropriations

February 8, 2022

Dear Chairwomen Kitchel, Toll and Committee Members,

I am in my second year as a VITA (Volunteer Income Tax Assistance) Volunteer. At a maximum **household** income of \$57,000 every taxpayer I work with has challenges. Every day, we work with many older and elderly Vermonters, single parents, and New Americans with language barriers. With all their challenges, I am absolutely amazed at the way these Vermonters are prepared to meet with the Volunteers. I can also testify to the amount of trepidation, bordering on fear, that comes with presenting their lives shown by numbers and papers.

The gratitude and relief that we see as we work with those in front of us is a thing of wonder. What might be a tense hour turns to be a good conversation, a time of support and sharing of possible resources for these families. There is a burden lifted when taxes are e-filed. I never knew I could hear "Thank you" relayed in so many ways.

We need your help. We are asking for an annual ongoing **\$400,000** shared among the five Community Action Agencies to cover the entire state on a full time, full year basis. To file more than 8,000 returns for low-income Vermonters, the Vermont Community Action Partnership will utilize this funding (valued at \$50 a return) to employ 5 full-time VITA Tax Coordinators (\$80,000 for salary, fringe, indirect, occupancy, technology) located at each of the 5 Community Action Agencies to provide year-round professional tax services to income eligible Vermonters. AND we will always rely heavily on volunteers.

Thank you for great support,

My best to you,



Jan Demers
VITA Volunteer

BROC Community Action

TOM DONAHUE

tdonahue@broc.org

Serving Rutland and Bennington Counties

Capstone Community Action

SUE MINTER

sminter@capstonevt.org

Serving Washington, Orange and Lamoille Counties; Granville and Hancock in Addison County;

Pittsfield in Rutland County; Barnard, Bethel, Rochester, Royalton, Sharon and Stockbridge in

Windsor County

Champlain Valley Office of Economic Opportunity

PAUL DRAGON

pdragon@cvoeo.org

Serving Chittenden, Franklin, Grand Isle and Addison Counties except for the towns of

Granville and Hancock

Northeast Kingdom Community Action

JENNA O'FARRELL

jofarrell@nekavt.org

Serving Orleans, Essex and Caledonia Counties

Southeastern Vermont Community Action

STEVE GELLER

sgeller@sevca.org

Serving Windham and Windsor Counties, except for Barnard, Bethel, Rochester, Royalton,

Sharon and Stockbridge in Windsor County

VCAP Annual Report 2020

VERMONT COMMUNITY ACTION PARTNERSHIP





The Vermont Community Action Partnership (VCAP) has been at the forefront of the community response to Covid-19 throughout Fiscal Year 2020. VCAP was immediately available throughout our state to offer swift action, leadership, innovation and flexibility to respond to emergent needs. Our staff are essential workers and while having to close some of our doors, we opened technology to meet acute and essential needs of food, housing and economic support and assistance. Each Community Action Agency brings different strengths and programs to make this happen. We work side by side with the Vermont Legislature, the Agency of Commerce & Community Development, the Vermont Office of Economic Opportunity, our neighbors and collaborators to solve problems and offer hope.

VCAP REACH
100%
 of Vermont cities,
 towns and peoples



VCAP PROVIDED SERVICES TO

- 52,499** Vermonters with low income
- 25,758** Vermont households
- 4,590** Vermonters of color
- 1,070** Vermont Veterans
- 2,936** Vermont seniors
- 9,059** Vermonters with disabilities
- 3,241** Vermonters employed full time
- 1,516** Vermonters experiencing homelessness

Data is taken for 125% of poverty matching those served by VCAP



THE VERMONT NEED

- 90,794** Vermonters live in poverty
- 16,282** Vermont children are living in poverty
- 18,703** Vermonters of color are disproportionately affected
- 8,356** Vermonters 65 or over are living in poverty



“I feel like I’m a completely different person than I was when we first started. I would not be anywhere close to where I am without you. I’m so proud of all this work that I’ve done!”

CARES ACT PROGRAM PARTICIPANT

Vermont Community Action Agencies helped thousands of individuals and families improve their economic stability. During 2020, with the help of the Vermont Legislature, we stemmed the tide of disintegrating micro-businesses, provided direct personal business counseling, offered educational workshops and helped Vermonters increase their financial capacity and hold on to and add to their savings accounts. We provided essential assistance with tax preparation and strategies in building a stronger future.

THE VERMONT NEED

22.6% of Vermonters have income volatility

20% of Vermonters have low financial well-being

21% of Vermonters own micro-businesses

VCAP REACH

2,663 received coaching to build assets and increase financial skills

728 attended financial capability classes

4,033 received tax assistance

436 Vermont micro-businesses received stimulus grants from VCAP's CARES Act program



VCAP ANNUAL IMPACT

295 Vermonters increased their savings

956 micro-business and development start-up classes

\$4,490,809 in tax refunds were brought back into the Vermont economy through the VITA Program

78 New Americans participated in financial coaching, house parties and classes

61% of CARES micro-business applicants were female or minority owned businesses

84% of VCAP micro-business owners rely on self-employment for household income

Head Start | Early Head Start | Parent Child Centers

Head Start, Early Head Start and Parent Child Centers promote early learning in children ages birth to 5 for families with low-income including children with disabilities. They are a strong segment of the Vermont childcare network. Health, dental, education for pregnant women and family services were delivered throughout the pandemic.

“I knew that Head Start would be good for my son. But I really didn’t know that it would be good for me.”

KAREN SHEARER

THE VERMONT NEED

4,482 of Vermont children between the ages of 0–4 live in poverty

12% of children of color live in poverty

36.4% of Vermont children are eligible for free and reduced lunch

VCAP REACH

786 children received dental assessments

1,064 children received physicals and/or various health screenings

1,568 children were served

1,310 home visits were made

VCAP ANNUAL IMPACT

1,320 parenting classes addressing barriers to stability were attended by Vermont families

1,557 parents improved family functioning skills

930 Head Start children became school ready



Community Ambassadors | VOICES | Fair Housing | VT Tenants
Mobile Home Program | Thrift Stores | Community Justice

Vermont Community Action staff advocate for our vulnerable neighbors, ensure that the voiceless and oppressed receive support through Community Justice programs and obtain basic necessities. Vermonters find security and relief from discrimination in housing and safety from domestic and sexual violence.

“Partnerships not only require us to think expansively about our own organizations, but also in the ways in which we can all grow together to strengthen our work in building safe, healthy and happy communities.”

JENNA O'FARRELL

THE VERMONT NEED

7.4% of adults do not have high school diplomas

1,986 of youth ages 16-19 are not working or in school

13.8% of Vermonters have poor or fair health status

VCAP REACH

720 attended Fair Housing workshops to learn about housing discrimination

452 were helped with low or no-cost clothing, furniture and household items by NEKCA, SEVCA and BROC

78 asylum seekers, New Americans, immigrants and refugees found a path to offer their support to other Vermonters at CVOEO

VCAP ANNUAL IMPACT

304 Vermonters avoided evictions

285 individuals improved their leadership skills through engagement in VCAP communities

523 improved self-employment skills to provide for themselves and their families

605 found safety in domestic and sexual assault intervention programs at CVOEO



“I used to come to the food shelf to pick up fresh vegetables for my son and me; if my business is successful, someday I’d like to give 10% of my profits to the Food Shelf.”

FORMER FOOD SHELF CLIENT & FOOD ENTREPRENEUR

Food Shelves | Community Kitchen Academy
Everyone Eats | Covid-19 Relief

The Community Action Agencies were some of the first on the scene to address the ever growing food insecurity brought on by Covid-19. They were able to do this because of more than 50 years of experience of feeding the hungry and promoting nutrition and the well-being of Vermont individuals and families with low income. We are the front line.

THE VERMONT NEED

71,600 Vermonters are food insecure

18,560 children are hungry

31,101 households are receiving 3Square VT benefits

VCAP REACH

14 regional hubs were established by Everyone Eats to keep restaurants in business feeding the homeless and hungry. Led by SEVCA, the effort partnered with **30** non-profit businesses and coalitions, over **125** restaurants and **60** farms and food producers

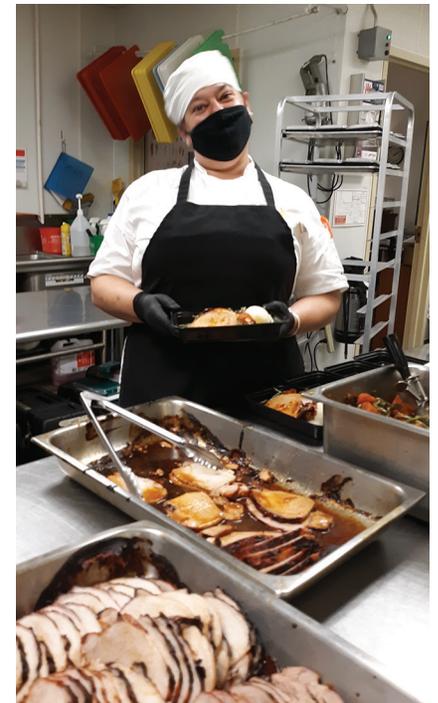
Community Kitchen Academy employed graduates to feed the hungry during the pandemic

4,630 individuals were assisted in applying for 3Squares VT benefits

VCAP ANNUAL IMPACT

105,419 hot meals were made and distributed to those who were hungry

21,256 boxes/bags of groceries were distributed



Homeless Housing | CARES

In the midst of a pandemic, when shelters needed to reduce for the safety of all staff and residents, VCAP agencies provided a shelter for Covid positive Vermonters, homeless hotel services and expanded housing to victims of domestic and sexual assault. This was made possible with CARES funding, the support of the Vermont Legislature and the leadership of the Vermont Agencies of AHS, DCF and OEO.

THE VERMONT NEED

1.3% vacancy rate for housing

1,481 unsafe and unsanitary occupied Vermont housing units

80,481 renter occupied households in Vermont

46.7% of renters have an unmanageably high housing cost burden

VCAP REACH

CVOEO opened a Covid-19 Recovery Center with the help of OEO in a matter of several weeks

VCAP agencies provided direct service to the homeless in hotel settings

1,516 homeless were helped to find permanent housing during the pandemic



GLEN RUSSELL/VT DIGGER

VCAP ANNUAL IMPACT

1,227 Vermonters experiencing homelessness found temporary housing

1,729 Vermonters obtained safe, affordable and permanent housing

1,675 received housing navigation support

897 received security deposits

840 received rental assistance

“It is not an understatement to say this is lifesaving work, particularly at this time of Covid-19...I would not have been able to navigate this on my own. Thank you for your dedicated work.”

EMERGENCY HOUSING PROGRAM GUEST

“I don’t know how I heard about you folks. Maybe it was fuel or public assistance. It doesn’t matter. I needed it and you were absolutely great. Thanks so much.”

WEATHERIZATION HOME OWNER

Weatherization | Emergency Home Heating | Crisis Fuel Warmth Program | CARES Utility

VCAP gives Vermonters with low income, especially older Vermonters, people with disabilities and families with children the ability to save fuel and money by improving the energy efficiency, safety and health of their homes. Vermonters are warmer, safer, healthier and have an increased ability to face the ravages of a pandemic in the midst of rising job loss, isolation and cold.

THE VERMONT NEED

16% of annual income spent on energy costs by Vermonters with low income

Vermont has some of the oldest housing stock in the nation

15.4% of adult Vermonters suffer from asthma

VCAP REACH

464 units/homes were weatherized by VCAP

\$903,090 was spent on labor, materials and replacement systems through the Emergency Heating Repair and Replacement program

VCAP ANNUAL IMPACT

1,529 Vermonters are safer, healthier and warmer because of the work of weatherization

1,365 Vermont homes were kept warm, safe and comfortable

10,494 were served through the Crisis fuel program for short term emergency assistance

1,422 Vermont households have improved energy efficiency and energy burden reduction



VCAP LEADERSHIP



CVOEO
CHAMPLAIN VALLEY OFFICE
OF ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY
PAUL DRAGON



CAPSTONE
COMMUNITY ACTION
SUE MINTER



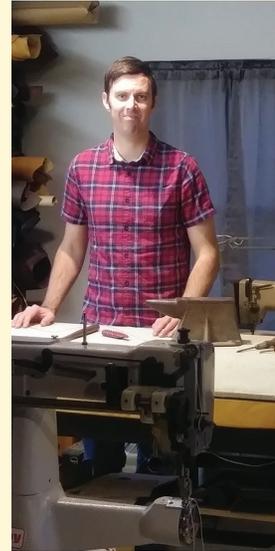
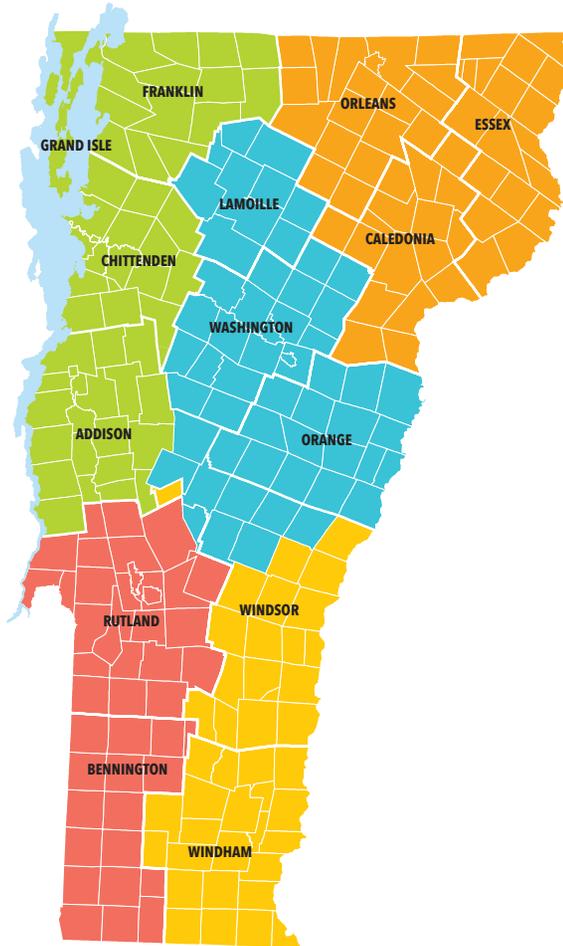
COMMUNITY ACTION
NEKCA
Together We Grow
JENNA O'FARRELL



BROC
COMMUNITY
ACTION
TOM DONAHUE



Meeting Needs | Changing Lives
SEVCA
SERVING AND LEADING COMMUNITY ACTION
STEVE GELLER



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:

Alison Novak and Kids Vermont at kidsvt.com. Sarah Henshaw at sarah@leavesofchangevt.com. The work of the Vermont State Legislature. Sarah Phillips and the Office of Economic Opportunity. National Community Action Partnership and CARES University of Missouri Extension. The staff and management of the five VCAP Agencies: BROC Community Action, Capstone Community Action, CVOEO, NEKCA and SEVCA.