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[UnitedWayAddisonCounty.org](http://UnitedWayAddisonCounty.org)

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January 16, 2024

Senator Ruth Hardy, Chair  
Vermont State Senate Committee on Government Operations  
115 State Street  
Montpelier, VT 05633

Dear Senator Hardy,

I am pleased to submit a written summary of the testimony I shared with the Senate Committee on Government Operations via Zoom earlier today. Thank you, again, for the opportunity to contribute to the important work of your Committee by sharing insights and perspectives from our experience in Addison County.

- United Way of Addison County (UWAC) is located in Middlebury. We have seven full-time staff members and two very part-time youth coordinators who are currently in high school and primarily work with us on school breaks and over the summer.
- In 2018 the board and staff at our United Way really doubled down on the goal to become “the resource hub” for nonprofits in Addison County who are working to improve health education and financial stability outcomes in our area. This goal is rooted in the firm belief that when our local nonprofit sector is healthy and strong then so too our community will be healthy and strong.
- UWAC has been leaning into a model called Trust Based Philanthropy, the tenants of which have informed how we respond to disasters.
  - First, we have worked hard to **reduce barriers to funding** by eliminating the formal application process and relying, instead, on site visits that give us a more holistic view and understanding of the work that's being done at the organizations that are asking for our support.
  - We've **unrestricted our funding** if we have learned anything over the past 4 years it's that we have no idea what the future holds and we believe it's really important that our local philanthropic dollars are free to be used how and when they're needed the most so that people in our county are get the help of they need when they need it and how they need it.
  - We also make **multi-year grants** so that organizations don't have to go through this process every year. Instead we make 3-year grants that they can rely on funding for a certain period of time which helps with planning and sustainability.
  - Perhaps the most important part of the trust-based philanthropy model is that we are very committed to being **more than a funder**. We currently have funding relationships

with 37 nonprofits in Addison County that we are in regular communication with. We are always actively looking for ways to further align the resources we hold at our organization to better support them.

- The **network of United Ways in Vermont is strong** and in regular communication. While we all share a core mission to improve outcomes in our communities, and while many of the challenges our communities are facing are actually statewide problems, the nuances of need in our community are different based on the resources that are available there. As a result, every United Way in this state has staff like UWAC's that are in regular communication and partnership with the change makers in their area, which makes us a very effective network all of the time, but especially during times of crisis.
- So thinking back to the rainfall during summer of 2023, Addison County was in a uniquely challenging situation where we weren't as impacted by the rainfall in July as we were by rainfall that later followed in August which left us **without a disaster declaration or any support from FEMA.**
- When it became clear that Addison County was not going to receive a disaster declaration I called our friends at Vermont Community Foundation who had launched an incredibly successful campaign for flood recovery and let them know that Addison County residents were being under-supported during this emergency. Vermont Community Foundation swiftly and generously made a \$60,000 contribution to Addison County Responds (the emergency relief fund we first established in 2020 in response to the pandemic). This inspired the United Way of Addison County Board of Directors to approve an additional \$20,000 from our own funding and within days, the **Addison County Responds: Flood Relief Grant program** was up and running with a very simple online application that was made available in English and Spanish, a comprehensive marketing campaign to make sure people knew about it, and a steering committee of volunteers and community leaders who helped review applications as they came in.
- Over the course of 70 days, from Sept 6th to November 15th of 2023, UWAC received 82 applications and made just over \$102,00 in grants ranging from \$250 to \$3,000 to individuals that had experienced flooded basements, damaged driveways, loss of personal property, etc.
- The steering committee was very thoughtful when it came to referring applicants to other resources and other programs that were available whenever possible. Just like when we are making grants to organizations, we were in regular communication with the people receiving our Addison County Responds grants and what we heard back from them was that, in many cases, they needed to pay for something like an appliance and then wait to receive reimbursement or a voucher afterwards and many people didn't have the funding available to them to do that and so I just want to shine a light on **how challenging the reimbursement model is** especially when people, businesses, or organizations are already in crisis and experiencing financial strain.
- In 2020 when we first launched Addison County Responds and made over a quarter million dollars in Grants to both individuals and nonprofits during the early days of the pandemic before other Federal and State Relief programs were established and running, it became clear abundantly clear that United Ways are really well suited to do this kind of work. We have the administrative structure in place, we have well established Community Partnerships, and a
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well-earned reputation for being a convener and a problem solver - **our communities look to United Way for help.**

- I'd be remiss not to note that all of the work I've talked about today has been done with private philanthropic dollars. **Imagine what greater impact we could have if the state, like our local communities, also looked to United Way during times of crisis and, together, we were able to reach every corner of the state and serve Vermonters how and when they need help.**

With Gratitude,

Helena D. Van Voorst  
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