

## United Way of Chittenden County Community Initiatives

### EDUCATION:

**Chittenden County Truancy Project:** In our effort to ensure that children, youth and young adults achieve their potential, we have supported the Chittenden County Truancy Project as a strategic initiative to improve high school graduation. It is one of the many strategies we invest in through our Education Impact Area. Research shows that school attendance is a strong predictor of school success. In the late 1990's, nearly 100 students each year were dropping out of high school in Burlington, almost 10% of the students grades 9-12.

Burlington School District adopted a new attendance policy in 1999. Since then:

- the Burlington School District annual drop-out rate has fallen from 9.5% in 1998-99 to 2.8% in the '10-11 school year
- in 1999, the estimated graduation rate (4 year cohort) was just 67%; in the '09-'10 school year, that graduation rate increased to 84.88% %
- annually, approximately 60 more students are graduating today than did in 1999
- overall absences have decreased by 25% since 2000.

In 2006, a county-wide attendance policy modeled after Burlington's was adopted by all school districts in Chittenden County, as well as three other contiguous counties. Today all districts in the state are required to have an attendance policy with a goal towards reducing the statewide drop-out rate.

Recently, Children's Health Magazine rated Burlington as the No. 1 city in the US to raise children. Education was the most heavily weighted measure and Burlington stood out from the national average in the number of students to graduate.

### INCOME:

**Working Bridges:** A goal of our Income Impact Area is to build workforce development capacity for youth and adults by providing supports so they have the well-being and assistance they need to work, and by training them for the job and life skills they need in the workplace. Working Bridges, a public-private partnership, helps individuals connect with resources and overcome barriers so that they are successful at work. It was created by concerned employers and UWCC to develop, test and share workplace practices to improve low to moderate wage workers productivity, retention, advancement and financial stability. More than 50 employers are engaged in the program through its trainings, employer workgroup meetings, income advance loan program, and/or on-site resource coordinator services. Evaluations demonstrate the program is positively impacting retention and absenteeism rates for local employers, while improving employees' economic stability.

100% of leading participating employers report that *Working Bridges* is helping them achieve their original goals:

- hiring, retaining, and advancing lower wage workers
- maximizing the effectiveness of their workforce
- helping their workers achieve financial stability

By investing a small amount of seed money, UWCC was able to leverage a large grant from Jane's Trust to launch Working Bridges.

### **The HelpFund of Chittenden County:**

The overarching goal of the Income Impact Area is to meet basic needs and promote financial stability. United Way of Chittenden County is a partner in The HelpFund, a collaborative effort of community service providers and faith-based organizations to consolidate assistance and information to more efficiently respond to the emergency needs of people in Chittenden County who are at risk of losing their housing. The HelpFund is fueled by donations from individuals, supporting organizations, foundations and others. All donations go directly to those in need. Partners with United Way are:

- Catholic Charities
- COTS Housing Resource Center
- CVOEO/Chittenden Community Action
- Joseph's House
- JUMP (Joint Urban Ministries Project)
- Milton Family Community Center
- Salvation Army
- VT Agency of Human Services DCF Economic Services
- VT Agency of Human Services Field Services
- Women Helping Battered Women

Goals of the collaborative project are:

- To prevent loss of housing – to assist households to stabilize finances during temporary emergencies.
- To make the process of seeking aid clear, simple and dignified.
- To make the process of granting aid orderly and the use of available funds efficient.
- To provide temporary assistance for access to basic necessities such as fuel, employment (if connected to housing preservation), or shelter that provides a long-term positive difference for an individual or family.

Between October 1, 2008 and May 31, 2011:

- 565 adults and 564 children from 397 households (unduplicated) received assistance
- These individuals/families were from 17 towns in Chittenden County (and 4 outside of Chittenden County)
- \$94,931 was provided for rent or mortgage assistance
- \$49,343 was provided for utility assistance
- \$2,876 was provided for other needs that impacted housing stability
- \$25,000 was used to subsidize unaffordable rent until 25 Section 8 housing vouchers became available. Result: 31 adults with 38 children are now in permanently affordable housing.

## **HEALTH:**

**Burlington Community Street Outreach Program:** This project was developed in 1998 to respond to concerns about the growing number of people in the downtown business district with unmet social service needs, including mental health and substance abuse. The goals of the project, which align under our Health Impact Area, are to: 1) connect people with unmet needs to services; 2) decrease the amount of antisocial behavior in the area; 3) decrease the amount of illegal activity in the area. Since its inception, incidents in the business district involving persons with unmet social and mental health needs have decreased, as have resulting calls to the police.

Between July of 2010 and June of 2011:

- the three full time outreach workers providing coverage to 7 days a week, 12 hours a day
- had 7,632 contacts
- with 517 different individuals,
- providing:
  - behavioral assessments,
  - monitoring behaviors/symptoms,
  - linking them with services,
  - following up on progress, and
  - working with program sponsors to maintain a vibrant and safe social and economic climate in the downtown.

Despite the trend of a younger and more diverse client base, this year the team's work shifted to more offender-based concerns, addressing more behavior with individuals involved in the legal system and Corrections who also have mental health and substance abuse issues.

The Team continues to collaborate with over 20 service providers on a weekly basis. These providers include homeless shelters, mental health providers, substance abuse treatment centers, hospitals, District Court programs and others. A Street Outreach Interventionist is now working out of the Burlington Police Department in a pilot project to be more proactive with individuals who may be in most need of outreach services and who in the past have been high users of emergency and other high cost services including police, ambulance, hospital, corrections, and courts.

United Way serves as the facilitator for the monthly Street Outreach Advisory Committee with other project partners: HowardCenter; Fletcher Allen Health Care; the Vermont Agency of Human Services; the City of Burlington; the Church Street Marketplace; the Burlington Business Association; the Burlington Police Department, CCTA and other nonprofit service providers.

In 2011, United Way invested \$10,000 this year in the Burlington Community Street Outreach Program, which leverages nearly \$200k in other funding to support the program.

**Days of Caring:** Give, Advocate, Volunteer- our call to action to advance the common good by creating opportunities for a better life. In the spring of 2011, IBM Corporation and the United Way of Chittenden County Volunteer Center collaborated with fourteen other organizations from Chittenden County to sponsor the 2011 Days of Caring. Over 600 volunteers from Bruegger's Enterprises, Champlain College, Citizens Bank, Comcast, Downs Rachlin Martin PLLC, Engelberth Construction, FairPoint Communications, Merchants Bank, NBT Bank of Burlington, New England Federal Credit Union, Northfield Savings Bank, PACE Vermont, People's United Bank, Sheraton Burlington Hotel and Conference Center and United Way of Chittenden County donated:

- 3,132 hours of service
- at 47 different nonprofit agencies
- for a value of \$59,400 based on the Vermont average hourly wage

**Vermont 2-1-1 is a telephone information and referral program of the United Ways of Vermont.** A public-private partnership that provides a single point of contact for access to community resources, Vermont 2-1-1 connects Vermonters with a trained information and referral specialist who evaluates the caller's situation or need and makes the connection to the appropriate community service. In 2006, call volume was **8,346**, and in 2010 reached an all time high of **47,998**. An additional 22,903 calls received professional assistance finding the resources they needed in 2010 over 2009.