United Way Key Strategy: Meeting Basic Needs

THE WHY

United Way of Northwest Vermont defines basic needs as housing, food and transportation. A place to live, food on the table and a means to get around are all essential needs for children to learn, families to get and keep employment, and for our entire community to thrive.

With the high cost of rent, a shortage of rental vacancies, skyrocketing home prices, and stagnant wages, many Vermont workers can’t find housing, or when they do—there’s not enough left over for other basic needs. Many low and even moderate-income workers simply can’t compete in the current housing market.

But housing is not the only basic need that’s difficult to come by in Vermont. Rural residents have few options for healthy, affordable and convenient places to shop for food, and having adequate and reliable transportation can be costly—especially in the winter.

The pandemic created even greater hardship for many, and some people found themselves needing community-based resources for the first time in their lives.

THE DATA

* The wage needed to afford a two-bedroom apartment in Vermont is $23.68/hour, but the average worker makes only $13.83, pushing the average person’s housing cost to more than 30% of their income ([Out of Reach 2021 study](https://reports.nlihc.org/oor)). The cost is even higher in Chittenden, Franklin and Grand Isle counties, where the housing wage to afford a two-bedroom home is $31.31.
* Data from two United Way programs, Vermont 2-1-1 and Working Bridges, show that housing and food are frequently among the top resources needed by community members served by these programs.
* Nearly 30% of Vermonters experienced food insecurity during 2020. One year later, nearly 2/3 of those Vermonters were still food insecure ([UVM](https://www.uvm.edu/news/gund/covid-19-food-insecurity-hits-record-levels-vermont), [Vermont Business Magazine](https://vermontbiz.com/news/2021/august/11/covid-19-food-insecurity-remains-high-one-year-pandemic))

WHAT WE’RE DOING

**Community Funding**

United Way of Northwest Vermont is making strategic community investments that cover a range of services and programs to help ensure that people in our community have their most essential needs met, like having a place to live, having enough food for their families and transportation to get to work. Funding supports housing retention services to ensure people don’t lose their homes; emergency shelter for people experiencing homelessness or fleeing domestic violence; and alternative housing options that support the unique and sometimes challenging needs of older adults or people with disabilities so they can stay in their own homes. It also supports food shelves and programs that bring meals and other essentials to older adults right to their homes so they can stay living independently for as long as possible.

**2022 Funded Partners**

ANEW Place

AALV, Inc.

Burlington Housing Authority

Champlain Islanders Developing Essential Resources (C.I.D.E.R.)

Champlain Valley Office of Economic Opportunity (CVOEO)

Chittenden County Homeless Alliance

Committee on Temporary Shelter (COTS)

Franklin & Grand Isle Community Housing Response Team

HomeShare Vermont

Martha’s Kitchen

Pathways Vermont

Samaritan House (CVOEO)

Spectrum Youth and Family Services

Steps to End Domestic Violence

**Working Bridges**

United Way’s Working Bridges program provides confidential on-site resource coordination and one-on-one counseling to employees in their places of work, helping them to navigate life challenges that impact their ability to maintain stable employment. Working Bridges Resource Coordinators regularly connect workers to community resources to meet basic needs like housing, food and transportation as well as childcare, mental health services, substance misuse treatment and recovery programs, and much more.

**Vermont 2-1-1**

A program of United Ways of Vermont, Vermont 2-1-1 is a statewide, confidential information and referral helpline that connects callers to available human services including food, shelter and healthcare. Callers speak with a real person every time who can help problem-solve and/or refer callers to government programs, community-based organizations, support groups and many other local resources.