United Way Strategy: Supporting Families

THE WHY

United Way supports the well-being of families and family members of all ages. For families to thrive, we need to prevent isolation and loneliness and help families access resources they need to model positive behavior to help their children learn and grow.

We know that isolation and loneliness in youth *and* older adults grew throughout the COVID-19 pandemic — which increases the prevalence of mental health and substance misuse. For youth, not having a supportive adult figure in their lives and lacking community connections correlates with increased rates of risky behaviors, like substance misuse ([CDC.gov](https://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/substance-use/index.htm)).

Isolation in older adults can be caused by a number of factors: a disability, harsh winters, lack of broadband internet, and little or no access to public transportation for rural residents. Research shows that isolation in older adults is tied to poor mental and physical health outcomes.

We want to ensure that youth, caregivers, and older adults are given support and access to resources to help them solve problems and have a place to go to make community connections. Like all areas of our work, family well-being is connected to so many other areas of community health and all United Way’s key strategies.

THE DATA

* Pandemic isolation and lifestyle changes have caused a drastic uptick in youth mental health concerns. Primary care pediatricians in Vermont are reporting a waitlist of patients, with [75-80% of cases being mental health related](https://npr-brightspot.s3.amazonaws.com/legacy/sites/vpr/files/202103/mental_health_impacts_on_vermont_children_and_youth_final.pdf).
* 47% of high school students report that COVID-19 has worsened school connections ([VT Youth Project)](https://vermontafterschool.org/vyp/) – truancy rates are up across all of Vermont.
* Vermonters 65 and older receive less social and emotional support than other age groups: 13% say they rarely or never get social or emotional support ([Vermont Department of Health survey](https://www.healthvermont.gov/health-statistics-vital-records/population-health-surveys-data/brfss)).
* Some [39% of older Vermonters live alone](https://www.vnews.com/vermont-addresses-loneliness-in-its-residents-vt-31157423).

WHAT WE’RE DOING

**Community Funding**

United Way of Northwest Vermont provides strategic community investments to support families through programs and services that: promote healthy people and relationships so parents and families can thrive; home visiting programs, where qualified staff visit new parents and young children at their homes to help them build knowledge and skills, provide resources to support young children and reduce the risk of child abuse and neglect; and nurturing parent classes where children and parents can come together to learn and grow. Our investments also support older adults and people with disabilities to lead rich, productive lives.

**2022 Funded Partners**

* Age Well
* Champlain Community Services (CCS)
* Franklin County Home Health Agency
* Janet S. Munt Family Room
* Lund
* Milton Family Community Center
* Northwestern Counseling & Support Services (NCSS)
* Prevent Child Abuse Vermont (PCAVT)
* UVM Health Network Home Health and Hospice

**United Way Programs**

United Way also operates an AmeriCorps Seniors program for adults ages 55 and older. These programs help older adults stay active in the community while serving a local nonprofit need.

RSVP

Volunteer coordinators find community-based volunteer placements for each volunteer based on their skillset and interests.

Foster Grandparent Program

The Foster Grandparents Program places adults in a local classroom setting. Volunteers work directly with at-risk youth to foster their learning, development and social interaction. This mutually beneficial connection creates better health outcomes for the volunteer and creates better developmental and academic outcomes for local children.

Bone Builders

Trained volunteers lead a light exercise class at community facilities around the region, preventing isolation and loneliness for older adults while simultaneously building their strength and reducing the risk of osteoporosis and falls.