

Legacy *Matters*



in this issue: Summer 2020

**Smart Investment:
COVID-19 Response
and Recovery**

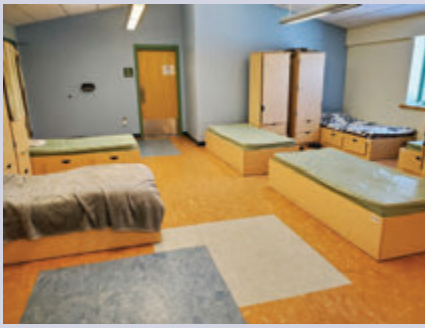
**Featured Fund:
Paul and Gloria
Konwerski Family
Fund**

**Community
Investment:
Frontline Worker
Appreciation**

**Good News
About the Valley:
2020 Responsive Grants Total
Nearly \$890,000**

Smart Investment

COVID-19 Response and Recovery



Social distancing measures ensure there are at least six feet between occupied beds in the dorms at Spooner House.



In July, Congressman Himes announced The WorkPlace was awarded a \$2 million Youth Apprenticeship Readiness Grant from the U.S. Department of Labor's Employment and Training Administration. The grant will be used to develop and support an apprenticeship program aimed at helping young adults pursue careers in the manufacturing industry.

The program will produce graduates with industry recognized credentials and will partner with Housatonic Community College's Advanced Manufacturing Program, Justice Education Center, Bigelow Tea, and Microboard Processing, Inc. Other officials attending the announcement included Gov. Ned Lamont (pictured above), Lt. Gov. Susan Bysiewicz, and Tom Coley, Regional President, Connecticut Community Colleges. The announcement was held at Bigelow Tea headquarters in Fairfield.

Over the course of many years, The Valley has developed a hard-earned reputation of collaboration. Especially during challenging times, this is particularly true of the people who live or work in this region. As needs quickly change and the community, like the rest of the country, has found itself in the midst of a global pandemic – The Valley has come together with compassion, creativity, and conviction.

David Morgan, President/CEO of TEAM, Inc. and Vice Chair for the Valley Council for Health & Human Services, said, “When I think back to March, I remember things got very scary and very dynamic very fast. People who needed help faced uncertainty as access points for assistance became limited or were shut down completely. Our switchboard was overwhelmed as people sought help.”

Food and shelter were needed most. Susan Agamy, MPA, Executive Director for Spooner House and Chair for the Valley Council for Health & Human Services, explained, “The pandemic hit everyone hard but it's been particularly challenging for those experiencing homelessness. Most shelters have a congregate layout with little opportunity for social distancing. Most people experiencing homelessness are also high-risk due to age, race/ethnicity, and underlying medical conditions.”

Agamy added, “The state stepped in and enlisted 15 hotels to house 1,000 people from 63 shelters as well as those living on the streets. We continued our case management work, providing meals, and crisis intervention as well as ensuring access to laundry facilities because there was still work to be done.”

Approximately 400 people statewide, including those from Spooner House,

have found permanent housing since the beginning of June.

Joe Carbone, President and CEO of The WorkPlace, believes the Valley will emerge stronger from the pandemic. “The impact of COVID-19 on the workforce and local economy is still evolving but there is tangible evidence of enthusiasm among consumers.”

“We went from 3.1% unemployment in this region to 19% in less than five weeks but it's important to note that this was an intentional shutdown and not a recession,” Carbone continued. “The momentum we saw prior to the pandemic is still there. Despite the high rate of unemployment, we're still seeing people getting jobs.”

No one has experience dealing with the economic impact of a virus on this scale. Carbone noted, “I think we need to worry about people in hospitality, retail, and some of the supportive fields in healthcare along with the impact of social distancing on businesses. We've seen some restaurants close but we need to recognize the impacts that the pandemic will have on manufacturing. As these businesses reopen, some must reconfigure the flow of product or change schedules to keep people six feet apart. The longer it takes to get back to what we called ‘normal,’ the more businesses will fail.”

The WorkPlace is also responding with an online version of its successful Platform to Employment program, which educates people on alternate occupations as the economy continues to change.

Carbone said, “The major objective is to avoid long-term unemployment. This program can keep individuals engaged as we offer motivation and job search support. Employers benefit, too, by having a path to a skilled workforce.”

Smart Investment

COVID-19 Response and Recovery

The safety of residents is directly linked to safety in the workforce and more conversations are taking place with partners in the business community. Agamy said, “As each business has its own response protocols, we have to think about a community approach. There have been many calls per week to match needs with resources. The Valley Council for Health & Human Services is all about community responses. Much of my work as Chair has been to ensure that ongoing communication is taking place as efficiently and effectively as possible.”

Morgan feels that the summer months have brought a welcomed and much needed change of pace. He has urged staff to use this time to rest and prepare for the months ahead. As moratoriums on rent end, unemployment benefits shrink, and an expected resurgence of the virus occurs, the situation could bring about a tsunami of various needs later this year. “We can’t take care of others if we’re not taking care of ourselves,” he said.

Agamy agreed, “This has been a perfect storm and, at the Valley Council, we’ve been able to look beyond the immediate crisis to equity issues in the Valley. I think we can be more inclusive with voices at the table and how that translates to identifying priorities and the work we do moving forward.”

The state has established regional long-term recovery steering committees to help provide input into needs and opportunities as they

evolve, and then match those needs to assets and resources at the state and federal level. She continued, “While we have Valley operations and initiatives, there will be pathways to other resources and knowledge bases.”

Morgan shared several successes: TEAM was able to identify volunteers who expressed interest and wanted to become part of the emergency response efforts. The new database of volunteers proved to be a critical resource, particularly for food pantries. Many food banks feared they would close because they lost their own core volunteers, many of whom were part of the at-risk population.



Seymour Oxford food pantry volunteers work with Ansonia Public Schools and TEAM staff to prepare food for distribution to clients. Pictured left to right: Robert Lisi, Ansonia Public Schools; Teri Archer and Toni Cassidy, Seymour Oxford Food Bank; and David Morgan, President/CEO of TEAM, Inc.

“Childcare had another ripple effect,” Morgan said. “Clearly having safe and affordable childcare options for workers is a part of effective public emergency response. If our healthcare workers didn’t have childcare, they couldn’t go to work. In collaboration with the state, TEAM has provided childcare for Griffin Hospital essential workers throughout the pandemic.”

TEAM also became a grab and go site for school lunches, and early on it became evident that those children ages birth to 4-years old were particularly vulnerable. “We were deploying a lot of formula and diapers. The surge in need was significant. We gave out more than 52,000 diapers over 90 days during the midst of the pandemic when our normal volume is 100,000 annually.”

Food pantries struggled with access to provisions just as the shelves in grocery stores went bare. The demand for Meals on Wheels went up by 29% as congregate and senior centers closed.

“Another element in all of this is human connection,” Morgan pointed out. “As levels of anxiety increased, people found they needed to connect with someone. I saw TEAM case workers talking longer with clients because these people simply needed someone to talk with. This has been a scary and isolating experience, especially for people in significant economic need.”

Agamy, Carbone, and Morgan and many more dedicated people throughout the Valley continue to meet at the state and local level, balancing unknown factors with the resources offered by people who want to contribute and be part of the solution during a truly unprecedented time. As each have of these leaders has acknowledged, the work to address the impacts of the virus is a marathon and not a sprint, and that we are truly all in this together.

Featured Fund

Paul and Gloria Konwerski Family Fund

The fund established by Paul and Gloria Konwerski's children – Paul Konwerski Jr., Peter Konwerski, Julie Konwerski Mauri, and Amy Konwerski – is keeping their parents' memory alive. The fund not only fulfills their wishes but has proven to be a way to foster Paul and Gloria's fondest hope

– that the family would continue to remain connected in a meaningful way long after they were gone.

While Paul and Gloria's children are now grown and each live outside the Valley, they felt strongly that the fund should benefit the area where their parents lived, worked, and started their family. Paul taught Social Studies at Shelton High School for 37 years. Gloria taught English, Latin, and Journalism at Naugatuck High School for more than 20 years.

"It's special to make a connection with a student every year who is graduating from where our Dad worked," Paul said. "It's another link to him and makes me look back and realize the impact we're creating. Our parents are still a big



Members of the Konwerski family

part of our life because we are able to use this fund to help others."

In creating a donor advised fund, the Konwerski family has the flexibility to recommend grants from the fund to qualified charitable organizations of their choice. In addition to supporting a scholarship, they have come to rely on VCF to identify community needs and present opportunities for the fund to support.

"The staff at VCF gives us ideas and, as a family, we talk about what our parents would have wanted to support," Julie said. "For our most recent grant, and given the circumstances of the pandemic, we decided to support the Valley Community COVID-19 Response and Recovery Fund so

we can help at a local level."

She also fondly recalled a thank you note she recently received from a graduating student who benefited from a scholarship. Julie is hopeful that the next generation of her family and the ones that follow will continue to be involved.

The siblings all feel strongly about the lasting impact the fund will have. "We realize we're only making small gifts to support a community that's close to our heart," Peter noted. "But it's very rewarding as a family to see the power of that philanthropy in the lives of Valley residents and through the schools and community organizations we've been fortunate to assist."

"We're amazed that we have been able to do this for more than 12 years," Amy added. "It's easier than many people think to start a fund at VCF. The return on investment hasn't just been about the fund growing over time, but rather how great it feels to help others and be involved in the Valley. It's wonderful to think of this as continuing our parents' legacy."



Planned Giving

Your planned gift will impact the charities you're passionate about forever, regardless of the amount. Call us at 203-751-9162 or learn more at valleyfoundation.org

Community Investment Frontline Worker Appreciation

The Valley Community Foundation Board of Directors last met in person during the month of March. The decision to cancel VCF's annual reception and other events was unanimously approved, albeit with much disappointment. The atmosphere of that meeting lightened considerably, however, after a Director suggested the Board redeploy the balance of the funds budgeted for 2020 events.

Members of the Board would soon agree that the best use of the funds would be to show appreciation for those working on the frontline in the Valley during the pandemic: first responders, care providers at nursing homes and assisted living facilities, and staff at both Griffin Hospital and TEAM, Inc.

From their homes during quarantine, Board members made calls to learn what was feasible given the restrictions that were put in place to slow the spread of COVID-19. Given VCF's role in connecting community resources, it was natural that the Board would seek a way to also support local businesses as part of this effort. David Grant Caterers, Spice Catering Group, and Tea with Tracy offered creative ideas to ensure VCF was able to provide meaningful demonstrations of appreciation to frontline workers. A coordinated series of meals and snack boxes were delivered to local nursing homes and assisted living facilities.

Board members worked with BJ's Wholesale Club in Derby to put together safely-contained care packages of assorted snacks and power drinks for first responders. BJ's delivered pre-packaged boxes of snacks to the VCF office and also donated several cases of bottled water to show further support. Board members then personally dropped off snacks and beverages to nearly 30 police departments, fire houses, and ambulance corps throughout the Valley,

all while practicing social distancing guidelines.

Board members also worked with Mizzi Cosmetics, a Connecticut-based beauty supply company, to put together products for the staff at Griffin Hospital. Special care packages of lotions and creams used to treat hands and faces ravaged by hand sanitizer use, masks, and other personal protective equipment were assembled and brought to Griffin.



Staff members from BJ's Wholesale Club in Derby delivered packed boxes of snacks and donated several cases of bottled water to support VCF's effort in thanking frontline workers.

The logistics of these endeavors proved to be both a challenge and an incredibly meaningful opportunity. A thank you of this scale had never been attempted before, and certainly not within the tight timeframe and restrictions outlined by the state. However, Board members were committed to ensuring that frontline workers knew how grateful the Valley community was for what they were doing for others.

Though the tokens of appreciation were small in comparison to what recipients were risking to help others, those who received a meal or care package took the time to express their thanks in handwritten notes, on social media, or with phone calls, reinforcing the message of how powerful a community can be when working together.

Third Round of Grants from Valley Community COVID-19 Response and Recovery Fund

Since the Valley Community COVID-19 Response and Recovery Fund was established in March, nearly \$150,000 in grants have been awarded. The Fund will be assisting a range of organizations serving the Valley throughout both the response and recovery phases of this pandemic.

Grants awarded include:

Adam Wysota Foundation
\$1,750

**Catholic Charities
Archdiocese of Hartford** -
\$2,000

Center Stage Theatre, Inc. -
\$2,000

**Connecticut Radio
Information System, Inc.** -
\$2,000

**Julia Day Nursery of
Ansonia, Inc.** - \$2,000

**Literacy Volunteers of
Greater New Haven** - \$2,000

**Massaro Community Farm,
Inc.** - \$1,800

**Valley Fire Chief's
Emergency Plan** - \$1,600

To view the full list of grants and descriptions, or to support the Valley Community COVID-19 Response and Recovery Fund, visit www.valleyfoundation.org. Gifts via credit card are strongly preferred over checks to reduce processing time. Checks can however be made out to Valley Community Response and Recovery Fund and mailed to 253-A Elizabeth St., Derby, CT 06418.



Non-Profit Org.
U.S. Postage
PAID
Bridgeport, CT
Permit No. 347

253-A Elizabeth Street
Derby, CT 06418

p: 203-751-9162 • f: 203-751-9352
WWW.VALLEYFOUNDATION.ORG

Good News About the Valley

2020 Responsive Grants Total Nearly \$890,000

VCF has awarded \$884,900 to 10 organizations as a result of its 2020 Responsive Grants process. These are single and multi-year grants that will provide a reliable source of funding in a time of financial uncertainty.

“On behalf of the Valley Community Board of Directors, we are proud to serve as a trusted and meaningful source of stability for the region’s nonprofits during such an unprecedented time of widespread need,” said Donald Smith, Jr., VCF Board Chair. “Due to COVID-19 and social distancing policies, the business operations of local nonprofits have been upended. Many fundraising events could not take place this year, programs were cut in some cases, and new responsive measures were implemented to assist those in the Valley facing the pandemic. These organizations are lifelines for both the individuals and families being affected by the pandemic, those living and working the Valley, and the region as a whole.”

Grants were awarded through VCF’s Responsive Grantmaking cycle, which is done with its partner in philanthropy, The Community Foundation for Greater New Haven (TCF). The program is funded by a generous annual grant from TCF’s Gates and other field of interest funds, as well as VCF’s unrestricted and field of interest funds.

2020 VCF Responsive Grant recipients:

Boys & Girls Club of the Lower Naugatuck Valley - To provide general operating support for cultural, recreational, physical, and educational programs to Valley youth. \$160,000.

Central Connecticut Coast YMCA - To provide general operating support for the Valley YMCA programming

that builds healthy spirit, mind, and body for Valley youth. \$140,000.

Friends of the Ansonia Nature Center (FANCI) - To support the renovation and expansion of the reptile and amphibian habitat exhibit at the Ansonia Nature and Recreation Center. \$25,000.

Housatonic Council, Boy Scouts of America - To provide general operating support for scouting programs for Valley youth. \$130,000.

Literacy Volunteers of Greater New Haven - To provide general operating support for adult literacy tutoring in Greater New Haven and the Valley. \$60,000.

Massaro Community Farm - To provide general operating support to maintain a historic farm using organic practices, to provide fresh produce to the needy, and to build community through farm-based education and events. \$4,400.

Online Journalism Project - To provide general operating support for The Valley Independent Sentinel to provide timely, accurate, and professional news to the Valley community. \$160,000.

Oxford Historical Society, Inc. - To support repairs of Mr. Munn’s Schoolhouse. \$12,500.

Shelton Historical Society - To support repairs of the Shelton History Center complex. \$13,100.

TEAM, Inc. - To provide general operating support for multigenerational service delivery system focused on support services, early childhood, and elderly services. \$180,000.