

Community Investment *Importance of Community Grants*

Do you have a great idea for improving the lives of your neighbors? Have you imagined enriching the lives of children or senior with a special project, or helping your town's community garden?

If your project needs more than great ideas and a strong volunteer spirit, consider the Community Grants program offered annually through the Valley Community Foundation.

Since 1994, more than 430 small groups received 858 grants, totaling approximately \$1.75 million. Each grant has a limit of \$2,500, which makes a difference for small volunteer groups aiming to make a big impact.

Most importantly, the application process is defined by a strong support system so that groups unfamiliar with asking for a grant are not overwhelmed or frustrated. Whether you and your fellow volunteers have obtained an official non-profit status for a long-term goal or just see an immediate need in your community, you can receive valuable help.

Elizabeth Kennard, who chairs the grant application review committee, said, "I do this because it's fun and fulfilling to work with others toward a positive outcome. We see so many different grants that represent real opportunities in the community, ways in which some very special people want to improve the lives of their neighbors and have a great impact. That's what drives me and others on the Committee to return to this work year after year."

VCF Program Officer Valerie Knight-DiGangi is available throughout the year, and especially during the application period, to make sure both the applicants and members of the review committee have all the answers they need. "This is the simplest grant process we have available here at the Foundation. We also provide a range of free or very low-cost workshops before the application is due, which can be valuable resources for information."

For those unable to attend in person, VCF and its partner in philanthropy, The Community Foundation for Greater New Haven, cosponsor a grantseekers webinar. This information is recorded and then posted on VCF's website so that anyone can learn more about this and all grant opportunities available through the Foundation. Knight-DiGangi commented, "We try to remove as many roadblocks as we can."

After all applications have been submitted, at the end of March, the Committee members read each thoroughly before meeting to make their final recommendations on which projects to fund. These grants are typically awarded annually in May.



Community Grant Review Committee Chair Elizabeth Kennard and VCF Program Officer Valerie Knight-DiGangi

Kennard said, "The projects are all unique and help in both small and big ways. The fact that people take the initiative to care about their neighbors strikes a real chord with me. I believe that, as more people become aware of this resource, we'll be able to do more to make our community better."

Knight-DiGangi added, "We've seen how a small infusion of grant funds can make some really amazing project shine even brighter. We strongly encourage people living, working, and volunteering in the Valley to explore this avenue or share the grant opportunity with someone you know who is trying to make the Valley a better place."

Sponsored Events

The following events are supported with unrestricted funds by VCF this season:

October

Pounding The Pavement for Pink

Seymour Pink's 7th Annual Pounding the Pavement for Pink Walk/Run on Oct. 6th.

3rd Annual Tea Social

Friends of the Ansonia Library's 3rd Annual Tea Social on Oct. 14th.

Valley Interfaith Council Film Screening

Join members of the Valley Interfaith Council for the screening of the film "Jerusalem" at Center Stage Theatre in Shelton on Oct. 10th from 7-9 p.m. The event will include light refreshments and a panel discussion following the film. The event is free and open to all faiths.

Community Grants

Groups can start an application starting in January by visiting www.valleyfoundation.org, clicking Impacting the Valley, and then Apply for a Grant. Previous grant recipients have created a kick-off event for kindergarten registration, enabled Ansonia and Derby Middle School students to tour a college campus, supported a Quilter's Guild, and provided education for students who have been arrested, suspended, or expelled from school.



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Good News About the Valley

VCF Awards More than \$23,000 to Support Local Programs

VCF has awarded a total of \$23,090 in its Community Grants Program to 11 community groups serving the Valley. These grants will support youth, seniors, and wellness initiatives in the region.

"VCF is proud to support these 11 organizations with more than \$23,000 in Community Grants," said Sharon Closius, VCF President & CEO. "Community Grants are responsive to volunteer groups or nonprofits with very limited staff, and support civic and community efforts in our five-towns. With this grant funding, these small organizations can have the potential to make a big impact in the Valley."



Volunteers and supporters of Adam's House, a 2018 VCF Community Grant Recipient, work on the organization's memorial garden and walkway.

Adam Wysota Foundation - \$2,500 to support the next phase of the Adam's House Memorial Garden and Walkway.

Annual Thanksgiving Basket Committee - \$2,500 to support the purchase of perishable and non-perishable food items and supplies for distribution of Thanksgiving baskets to 50 families.

City of Derby, Youth Services Bureau - \$2,000 to support a program to help students recognize consequences of poor decisions and provide opportunities to make amends.

College Access for all Kids, Inc. - \$2,500 to support urban youth access to colleges, universities and other higher education possibilities.

Derby Green Farmers Market - \$1,400 to support the innovative Power of Produce Club program, which provides participating children with education and experience in purchasing and using healthy fruits and vegetables at the Derby Farmers' markets.

Derby Historical Society - \$2,500 to support transportation assistance for Valley schools to visit the General David Humphreys House.

Shelton Farmers Market - \$2,500 to support the Valley Sprouts Club, provide more local music at the market, reach out to Valley schools, and provide health related services for visitors.

Southford Falls Quilt Guild - \$2,500 to support "Quilting Outside the Box" programs which focus on new quilting trends, tools and techniques.

St. Joseph Parish Nurse Program - \$600 to support education and wellness programs on CPR and AED use, heart disease and stroke prevention, and the importance of advanced care planning.

Town of Seymour - \$1,590 to support the Senior Fit & Strong exercise program.

Youth 2 Youth - \$2,500 to support the cost of sending students to the national conference in RI.

VALLEY COMMUNITY FOUNDATION NEWSLETTER

Legacy Matters



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FOR GOOD FOR EVER FOR THE VALLEY

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Common Asthma Triggers:

- Pets
- Intense exercise
- Air pollution
- Tobacco smoke
- Fragrances and aerosol
- Dust mites and mold
- Allergens
- Cold weather
- High humidity
- Stress



Approximately 45% of houses in Ansonia and Derby were built before 1950, long before 1978, when manufacturers stopped adding lead to paint to brighten colors and increase durability.



Lead education is key. Many people are unaware of the dangers associated, such as a window that can produce invisible particles of lead each time the sash is opened or closed.

Smart Investment
Responsive Health Measures for Children and Families

They say an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. This is especially true in two specific areas—asthma and lead poisoning. Although children with asthma performed on par with their non-asthmatic peers on standardized tests, according to a Journal of School Health research study, students with asthma were absent more than 1.5 times than those without the condition. This absenteeism increases along with grade level and the trend can follow students through their college experience. As for the negative effects of lead poisoning, even the smallest amounts of blood lead levels at around 24 months of age are associated with lower performance on IQ tests later in childhood.

Given that asthma can be managed with highly effective yet inexpensive methods and that lead poisoning can be avoided all together, programs in these areas here in the Valley are well worth the community’s investment.

The Naugatuck Valley Health District (NVHD) is improving the management of asthma cases in Valley children ages 1-13 in order to target children in daycare and the early ages of school. In fact, they’re addressing the problem on a level that exceeds prevention; the Connecticut Department of Public Health has documented a rise in the number of students in grades PreK-12 with asthma and students in Naugatuck were more likely to have asthma than students in the state overall.

The Asthma Management for Childcare Providers program “Freedom 2 Breathe” promotes awareness and supports families who have one or more children who have been diagnosed with asthma. One of the tools in this educational effort focuses on the importance of children having an Asthma Action Plan. Parents

and caregivers are taught to work with children and monitor how they feel using a green-yellow-red system.

Identifying and reducing asthma triggers can help empower children to feel well more often and stay in the green zone, encouraging them to be active physically, academically, and socially. When children do need to use their inhalers, they can do so more effectively because of the training received from program leaders like Carissa Caserta, MPH, NVHD Interim Director.

“I’m passionate about helping kids breathe,” said Caserta. “I’ve seen kids struggle with asthma. I’ve been involved with this program for two years and overall asthma education for seven. What we’re doing is succeeding.”

A daycare director at The Learning Studio in Derby commented, “Each staff person left with a better understanding of what asthma is. We learned ways to detect, prevent, and treat it. With having children at our center who have asthma, we find it very important to be knowledgeable on the topic. It is a great program for the community!”

After initial success with parents and caregivers, the education program expanded to day care centers. The next step is to loop in doctors so that a consistent, effective Asthma Action Plan is implemented for all patients.

Through proactive work, it is absolutely possible to help children stay active. Healthier children do better in school because they attend more classes and pay attention to lessons instead of struggling to breathe.

Parents have expressed deep gratitude as advocates like Caserta help them perform simple but critical

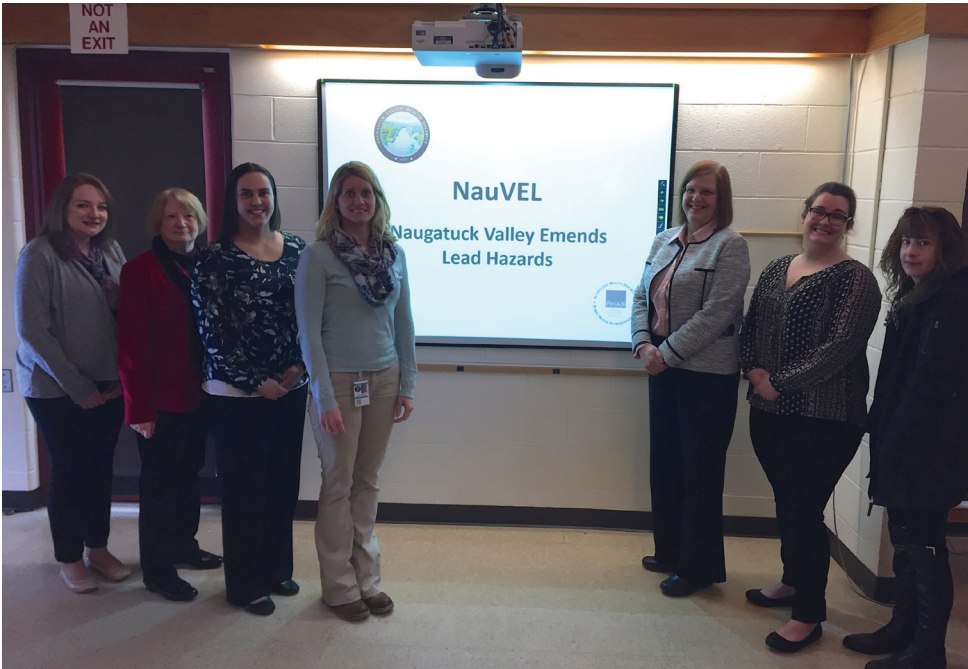
Smart Investment
Responsive Health Measures for Children and Families

tasks to keep children happy and healthy. For example, parents learn that stuffed animals can be put into a dryer to kill dust mites that can trigger an asthma attack.

“Simple solutions can have significant impact,” Caserta pointed out that the minimal cost of the program is a good investment given the costs that can be avoided.

Unlike asthma, lead poisoning is not on the rise but is still a problem in the Valley. The overall housing stock in the Valley is likely to contain lead-based paint.

The solutions are straight forward—education and remediation. By making the public aware of the danger and by removing this toxin from the home, long-term health and behavior problems can be avoided and so can the negative effects on a developing child, which include learning and reading problems, delayed growth, and hearing loss.



Naugatuck Valley Health District staff at the launch of the Naugatuck Valley Emends Lead Hazards (NauVel) Program

Programs such as Naugatuck Valley Emends Lead Hazards (NauVel) have proven worth the investment, giving children a healthier start in school and in life. Carol W. Slajda, MA, MBA, program manager for NauVEL, said “Lead poisoning is 100% preventable but, once a child is infected, there is permanent damage and the cost of care is exponential.”

Education leads to identifying and removing the source of lead poisoning so that, in the future, this may be a problem of the past. NauVEL provides funds for testing and remediation if those living in the home meet income eligibility guidelines.

“Property owners don’t have to pay back the money, just promise to maintain the property and market vacancies to families with children under six years of age or those who fall into the greatest risk factor.” Slajda notes there

are barriers to success. Often those living in older homes are struggling in many ways and may be reluctant to share financial information or admit that they do not have another place to stay during the remediation period.

In addition to addressing lead poisoning, a Healthy Homes Supplemental grant focuses on identifying and dealing with dangers such as radon and asbestos or issues such as proper ventilation.

“We help the property owner make the home safer and more comfortable for tenants and increase the value of the property. Also, many insurance companies require lead-safe certificates so that’s an added benefit. This is a win-win situation. I’ve seen the benefits and want to make the Valley safe for our children.”

Proactive efforts are working; the number of Valley children under age six with elevated blood lead dropped between 2004 and 2013, which is good news.

“It’s important to get your child tested twice between nine and 36 months because early detection is key to minimizing damage if the child has been exposed to lead,” Caserta advised. The second test, which is often missed, is perhaps more critical because of the increased risk of exposure as the children become mobile and find potential lead sources on their own.

Anyone who would like to learn more about these programs to minimize the negative impacts of asthma lead poisoning, receive education, or find assistance, can call Caserta at 203-881-3255.

Featured Fund
The Peter Vartelas Invest in Youth Fund

The Peter Vartelas Invest in Youth Fund for the Valley YMCA is just one example of how a family that wasn’t born in the area grew to love and embrace the Valley with its long-standing family tradition of giving.

Peter grew up as one of 12 children, born to Greek immigrants. As a boy, he discovered that sports were a way for him to become a part of the local community and, as such, especially cherished his time at the Valley YMCA.

His nephew, Greg Stamos, remembered how “Uncle Peter” would talk about his many experiences at the YMCA and, in particular, recalled a conversation between Michael Cook, head of programming at the Y, and his uncle.

“When Michael mentioned that some children didn’t have money for memberships, Uncle Peter decided it was his time to give back. He became focused on creating a fund to help those kids. Peter started fundraising, advocating for the Y, and reminding others of how they received some form of help from the community. He used all of his contacts and skills as a salesman, even asking me to make a sizeable contribution! I was just starting out as an attorney and could only give half of what I

was asked. But Uncle Peter matched my gift. That’s just the kind of guy he was.”

While the YMCA managed the fund, Peter enjoyed great pride in the fact that children could access sports and social opportunities that they would otherwise never be able to access.

“He loved nothing more than to bump into someone from the Y and hear anecdotes about how the kids were doing,” said Greg.

Soon, Greg became involved with the Valley Community Foundation. “I was President of the Board and wanted to connect Uncle Peter’s work with VCF. It ended up being a perfect fit.”

The YMCA embraced the idea, as did the family. The Vartelas and Stamos families would later go on to establish several more funds at VCF over time. Greg explained that his family, even after Peter’s passing in 2004, remains very close and has a place for the Valley, especially Ansonia, in their hearts.

He added, “Uncle Peter didn’t go to college and he earned every penny through honest labor. Nothing was handed to him but he felt that giving back was important



Peter Vartelas

and that tradition goes way back in our family.”

Over the years Greg has performed pro bono legal work for the YMCA. “Whenever I was asked why I wouldn’t charge, I’d tell them that if Uncle Peter ever found out I’d done that, he would have found a way send me message from heaven. Maybe even a lightning bolt!”



Planned Giving

VCF posthumously welcomes Mary Theresa Mahoney to the Gates Society, the Foundation’s planned giving community.

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