

# Legacy *Matters*



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# Smart Investment

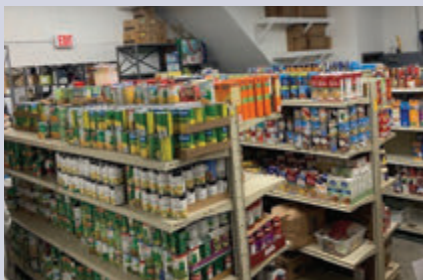
## Addressing Food-Related Hardship



*Valley United Way's community gardens, like this one located at Griffin Hospital in Derby, are appearing in neighborhoods throughout the Valley to provide access to fresh produce.*



*Started in 2005, Harvest House collects more than 100,000 nonperishable food items for Valley food banks. This year, Harvest House will be accepting nonperishable food donations on Thursday, September 26th at Shelton's Rotary Pavilion on Canal St. in Shelton.*



*While nonperishable food items such as canned goods and pasta are always in demand, recent efforts are being made to encourage contributions of fresh produce and nutrient-rich food options.*

Sometimes the most basic necessities, such as food, can easily be taken for granted. For most, the question as it relates to food is, "What time should I eat?" For others, the question can be as dire as, "How am I going to find my next meal?"

Are there people in the Valley who have to face food hardship and go hungry? Yes. Is anything being done about it? The answer is a resounding yes.

There are three contributing factors to food hardship: availability (having sufficient quantities of appropriate food available), access (having adequate income or other resources to access food), and utilization (having adequate dietary intake and the ability to absorb and use nutrients in the body).

Grow Your Own, Valley United Way's Neighborhood Garden Program, builds fruit and vegetable gardens in high-need neighborhoods so residents can simply walk to pick fresh produce. Last year, 2,700 pounds of produce was harvested and there are three new sites in 2019, for a total of 13 locations in the Valley.

Harvest House is another example of the Valley's initiatives addressing food hardship. Started in 2005, and driven by Valley United Way's Corporate Volunteer Council, a temporary 400 square-foot house is constructed of walls made of shelves. The shelves are then stocked with more than 100,000 donated nonperishable food items and distributed to food banks in the Valley. This year, Harvest House will be accepting nonperishable food donations on Thursday, September 26, 2019 at Shelton's Rotary Pavilion on Canal St. in Shelton.

David Morgan, President and CEO of TEAM, Inc., said, "Despite efforts like these, we were finding shelves empty at the five Valley food pantries. Valley food banks were in obvious need of help."

Morgan, along with Patricia Tarasovic, Vice President of Community Engagement at Valley United Way, serve as the co-chairs of the Valley's Food Security Task Force (FSTF). There was a clear need in the Valley to create a systems-level change to address the complex issue of food hardship. As such, the FSTF took action to better understand and address local needs and opportunities associated with food hardship.

Many factors made it difficult to articulate the pressing challenges to both legislators and potential donors. Even something as basic as tracking the amount of food needed was hampered by inconsistent methods for how it was tallied.

"It was difficult to quantify how much food went out the pantries' doors at first because there was no common metric," Morgan added. "Some pantries measured meals, others weighed pounds, and still others counted boxes, bags, or containers."

Collaboration among food pantries led to a standard metric. "We now know that our pantries are distributing 65,000 pounds of food every month to almost 2,000 individuals. With that data, we can inform donors, educate decision makers, and clearly show the need."

The data also indicates that 30% of food pantry users are children age 0 - 15 and 15% are seniors over age 60.



# Smart Investment

## Addressing Food-Related Hardship



Members of the Food Security Task Force stand for a group photo outside Massaro Community Farm.

Tarasovic said, “A multi-year grant from VCF has meant access to a consultant that we could only dream of without their support. We’re now seeing both the literal and metaphorical fruits of our labor as we follow through on the data. With this help, we have a resource guide, standardized data reporting, and a way to inform the community.”

The guide features the most up-to-date information about food resources available in the five Valley towns and gives community members an easy way to find resources such as food pantries, farmers’ markets, and community gardens.

Tarasovic noted, “Food hardship is the tip of the iceberg and a gateway to educate and inform the community about needs beyond immediate nourishment.”

Understanding those needs and knowing what action can be taken leads to programs such as the Valley Initiative to Advance Health & Learning in Schools at Griffin Hospital, which promotes a healthy lifestyle to Valley students and combats childhood obesity with nutritional information and physical

activities. The garden program coordinates cooking demos and nutritional education programs to show residents how flavorful and healthy vegetables can be.

In addition, the Valley United Way has been a vital supporter of area food banks. Tarasovic said, “We hear their

needs loud and clear. When volunteers step up, we can do more - like adding another afternoon or whole day to the food pantry schedule, which provides more access to much needed items. Even an hour of help makes a difference and we see phenomenal people demonstrate a passion for this effort.”

She also sees that more than just food is shared. “The pantry is a point of entry and people can connect with other services. Through the FSTF, we’ve learned that the original mission to feed hungry people in the Valley is now much larger and more powerful. One food pantry with an excess will contact another to share it with before it expires. That might sound like a minor detail but it’s really critical in preventing spoilage and shows what people can do when they care about one another.”

“It’s important to note that the need for nutritious food is year-round,” Morgan added. “The public schools provide a significant service every day with lunches and snacks but we recognize there is a nine-week period over summer break when children go

without. The task force has responded by creating a subcommittee to create summer meal sites to address that gap.”

Healthy food options are in high demand. Morgan remembers the situation prior to a collaborative effort. “I visited a pantry that had three refrigerators. Inside were sheet cakes and pastries and only one small basket of produce.”

“The increased access to healthy options not only changes our approaches within the pantries but how we inform our donors,” Morgan said. “We’re grateful for boxes of pasta but we’re also advocating for donations of fresh fruits and vegetables as well.”

Given the perishable nature of nutritious foods, innovative solutions are examined, such as relationships with food distributors to stretch monetary donations. Unhealthy food choices are often quick and cheap but lack beneficial nutritional value.

“This isn’t about filling a belly but making things better overall. The bigger picture includes interrelated issues around basic needs and socioeconomic wellbeing, as well as health and wellness,” Tarasovic said.

Effective food pantries can be a vital tool in overcoming the challenge. Valley nonprofit leaders continue to demonstrate an ability to address food hardship yet volunteers and donors are key to sustaining outcomes. Anyone interested in making sure that the Valley’s residents can find the food they need to thrive is invited to sponsor a garden site, support a local food hardship program, make an in-kind gift, or donate nutritional food.

# Featured Fund

## Massaro Community Farm Funds

Massaro Community Farm has become a gathering place where members of the Valley and Greater New Haven communities can learn about more than the Massaro family's history of dairy farming and find a wide variety of locally grown produce.

The farm has a mission to keep farming, feed people, and build community for generations to come. These core principles shape the farm's operations, workshops, events, and educational programming that take place on its 57 acres to promote the importance of connecting to locally-sourced food. The farm itself and the programs it provides has become an anchor in the community where families can create their own chapters in the farm's long history.

Located on the Ansonia-Woodbridge town line, the farm supports both Greater New Haven and Valley communities with a vegetable subscription program, on-farm and in-school education, and thousands of pounds of produce, which are given to hunger relief each year.

The farm's unique geographic location means that its impact is felt throughout and beyond VCF's sphere of influence. "We are literally on the border of Woodbridge and Ansonia, so we

get a lot of visitors from both Greater New Haven and the Valley," said Executive Director Katy Poole. "The farm also provides fresh produce to food banks in both the Community Foundation for Greater New Haven (TCF) and VCF's service areas. We work with both VCF and TCF to help meet the needs of residents who have limited healthy food choices."

The Massaro Community Farm Fund was first established as an organization fund with the Valley Community Foundation in 2017, which is a way in which nonprofits can entrust assets to VCF for investment purposes only. Since then Katy has seen new opportunities bloom for the former family dairy- turned-community farm.

The farm's board created the Massaro Farm Legacy Fund, an endowed fund at VCF, in 2018. One of Massaro's board members additionally established the Get Outdoors and Enjoy Nature Fund, which is a designated fund for the farm at TCF that will continue to support the farm in perpetuity. This board member has also encouraged others to donate to this fund to increase support for Massaro far into the future.

"As farming people, we think of growing, even when talking about



Massaro Community Farm

our donor base and cultivating supporters," Katy said. "We've used a portion of the funds to redesign our website and direct prospects to the Valley Gives Back®, the Valley's community-wide planned giving initiative, in support of bequests for the farm. We were also able to expand our outreach with more mailings throughout the year and personalized efforts such as sending handwritten thank you cards."

She added that VCF is a valuable resource center, offering guidance and direction to organizations such as the Massaro Community Farm, which has a limited number of staff and volunteers to tackle a great deal of work. "VCF has provided a way for everyone to contribute, whether it's with their own fund or by adding to an existing fund. That is just one way that our board, staff, volunteers, and especially our visitors can express their passion for preserving the farm that has come to mean so much to us all."



## Planned Giving

VCF welcomes brothers Fred and David Ortolì 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](http://valleyfoundation.org).



# Community Investment

## 2018 Grant Impact

VCF's responsive grant distributions are announced each year, providing details about the receiving organization, the grant amount, and its purpose. But what happens after VCF awards a grant to a nonprofit? These grants can range from a single-year distribution to a multi-year award and can provide operating support, assistance with capacity building efforts, or a particular project. As part of VCF's terms of grant, the receiving organization is required to report on outcomes and data showing the impact of that funding – something we would like to start sharing with you.

### Valley Independent Sentinel

With a two-year general operating grant awarded in 2015, the Valley Independent "Indy" Sentinel has continued to provide trustworthy local reporting, copy desk work, sports reporting, website management, sales, and marketing operations. During the term of this grant, the Indy website received 2.9 million visits totaling 6.2 page views. The podcast has proven to be an opportunity to cover both different areas and topics within the Valley, which has received 13,000 downloads on iTunes. The Indy's greatest success as a result of this grant was in its use of technology and its ability to maintain transparency in challenging, rapidly evolving times.

### Derby Day Care Center

With a single project support grant awarded in 2016, the Derby Day Care Center installed new playground equipment. As a result, 50-60 children use the playground daily and have greater opportunities to experience a

wider variety of movement activities. Prior to its installation, some children never had the opportunity to climb, slide, or dig in a sandbox. As such, 37% of the children assessed made improvements in their gross motor skills. In just over a year following the playground's installation, the number of children who measured overweight or obese decreased by 12%.



The new playground at the Derby Day Care Center, installed in May 2017, is used by dozens of children daily.

### Boy Scouts of America, Housatonic Council

With a one-year general operating grant awarded in 2016, the BSA Housatonic Council was able to achieve national recognition as a Silver Level Council through the Scout's Journey to Excellence program. The Council purchased additional supplies for its STEM Center, installed a new gaga ball pit, held five merit badge days in the Valley, and launched a weekend program at Camp Strang. As a result of this grant, the number of youth who achieved the rank of Eagle Scout was double the national average and nearly 1,500 merit badges were earned.

## Sponsored Events

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

### October

#### Pounding the Pavement for Pink

Seymour Pink's 8th Annual Pounding the Pavement for Pink Walk/Run on Oct. 5th.

### The 2019 Valley Community Index

As you may know, the 2019 Valley Community Index will be released in October. This comprehensive data collection effort reports on timely socioeconomic trends in the seven-town region. There are nearly 40 partner organizations working together to create this report, which will offer an in-depth update on the Valley's well-being originally detailed in the 2016 Index. The data will be used to further convene community conversations, align efforts and investments, and collaborate on strategic endeavors address the changing needs and opportunities of our Valley.

Join us on October 22, 2019 from 8am-10am when we will share the findings of the Index and unveil the report at the R.D. Scinto Auditorium in Shelton. Call VCF at 203-751-9162 or visit [www.valleyfoundation.org](http://www.valleyfoundation.org) to RSVP.





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# Good News About the Valley

## VCF Awards Grant Funds to Support Local Programs

VCF awarded a total of \$17,275 in its Community Grants Program to eight community groups serving the Valley. These grants will support youth, seniors, historical endeavors, and wellness initiatives in the region.

“With more than \$17,000 in grant funding, these eight community groups are doing meaningful work in the Valley,” said Sharon Closius, VCF President & CEO. “We are proud to be able to offer funding through our Community Grants Program to responsively support volunteer groups and nonprofits with very limited staff in our Valley’s five towns.”

### 2019 Community Grant Recipients:

**Annual Thanksgiving Basket Program** - \$1,250 to support the purchase of perishable and non-perishable food items and supplies for distribution of Thanksgiving baskets to families in need.

**Derby Historical Society** - \$2,500 to support Valley schools to defray the partial cost of their transportation to “A Day in 1762”, a hands-on living history program at the General David Humphreys House.

**Music Mends Minds (Valley Chapter)** - \$1,500 to support the improvement of the lives of patients with dementia, Alzheimer’s, Parkinson’s, traumatic brain injury, stroke, and PTSD through the healing power of music.

**Oxford Senior Center Singers** - \$2,110 to support the purchasing of a synthesizer and accessories so Senior Center Singers will have accompaniment during rehearsals and performances.

**Seymour Soccer Association** - \$2,500 to support an indoor winter activity that promotes physical activity, education, and soccer foot skills such as dribbling and ball handling.

**Shelton Historical Society** - \$2,415 to support an exhibit of rarely seen artifacts, photographs and documents throughout the Shelton History Center for the 50th anniversary of the Historical Society’s founding as well as the 100th anniversary of the naming of the City of Shelton.

**Shelton Youth Service Bureau** - \$2,500 to support sending high school students to the Youth to Youth Eastern States Conference in R.I. The event focuses on an approach to drug education and information, personal growth through decision making, environmental change, and drug free fun.

**Southford Falls Quilters, LLC** - \$2,500 to support demonstrations of techniques, promotion and display of personal and charitable quilt making.



Southford Falls Quilters Guild quilts on display at the Quilt Show and Tea in Seymour.