

Legacy *Matters*

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while Honoring Loved Ones**

Smart Investment Addressing Chronic Absenteeism

K-3 Chronic Absence, 2013-14

 **10%**
ANSONIA

 **13%**
DERBY

 **4%**
OXFORD

 **7%**
SEYMOUR

 **7%**
SHELTON

Source: *Shining a Spotlight on the Valley Region, Page 6*



*Dr. Carol Merlone,
Superintendent of
Ansonia Schools*

The U.S. Department of Education reports that over 6 million students – approximately 14 percent of the country’s student population – missed 15 or more days of school in the 2013-14 school year.

Defined as missing more than 10 percent of school days for any reason, chronic absenteeism is a multifaceted challenge that is currently being addressed in a variety of ways.

In the Valley, students have a slightly lower rate of chronic absenteeism of about 11 percent, which is similar to other regions throughout the State of Connecticut. Of the five core Valley towns, Ansonia and Derby schools experience the highest absence rates.

While chronic absenteeism is a challenge for administrators, it provides a unique opportunity to work more collaboratively with other school districts and municipalities to uncover the root causes of problems, which may go beyond a student’s willingness or ability to attend class.

“Chronic absenteeism interferes with a student’s ability to be successful in school and often leads to failure, retention, and dropout,” says Ansonia’s Superintendent of Schools Dr. Carol Merlone. “This can often lead to adverse lifelong challenges associated with finding employment or sustained employment.”

Dr. Merlone explains how her team is addressing chronic absenteeism in Ansonia. “Ansonia High School is continuing to work with families that have students who are truant and chronically absent,” Merlone says. “We put into practice many of the guidelines set forth by the State of Connecticut.”

Much like the proverb – it takes a village to raise a child – multidisciplinary school staff and resources are working together to address this particularly vulnerable student population.

“We utilize our professional capabilities - social worker, school psychologist, guidance staff, administration and local outside agencies, when appropriate - to support families and students,” says Merlone. “We follow up with students and families with our attendance officer during student support team meetings. We also take advantage of the State website attendtodayct.com to utilize tools that fit students’ needs.”

Signs of chronic absenteeism begin early in a child’s academic career. Maintaining attendance is critical to development, especially for young children. By age five, a child’s brain has already developed to 90 percent of his/her adult capacity. Regardless of his/her socioeconomic background, positive interactions at home, in the community and in structured settings, such as school, improve the ability to learn, self-express and engage with others.

Strong language and learning skills acquired by the end of kindergarten lay the foundation for reading proficiency by the end of third grade, which enables children to transition from learning to read to reading to learn. Children who do not develop these skills often have a more difficult time catching up and successfully graduating. Chronic absenteeism can further disrupt or delay learning as students mature and enter an increasingly more competitive workforce.

Just like in Ansonia, Derby Youth Services Director, John Saccu, sees similar patterns in Derby.

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- Dr. Carol Merlone

Smart Investment Addressing Chronic Absenteeism



Photo Kathleen Cei

John Saccu, Derby Youth Services Director, says absenteeism can be symptomatic of a family living in transition.

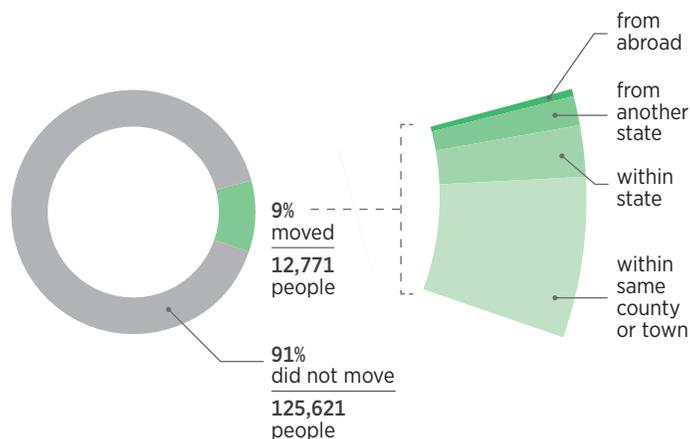
“Truancy is a complex problem with many contributing factors,” says Saccu. “One of the underlying reasons for continued absenteeism is the availability of housing here in the Valley, especially within Ansonia and Derby.”

The timing of a move may have more rippling consequences for children than the move itself. Whether because of a job loss, a lease expiring, or other circumstances that may force a family to move during the school year, the transition can come with a cost to academic performance. This can be especially true for students who are English language learners or for whom English is a second language.

“Moving from residence-to-residence throughout a child’s academic career significantly impacts his/her ability to learn, especially if it occurs mid-year,” Saccu adds. “Where the young person may be academically at one school may not be exactly where s/he begins at a new school.”

Dr. Merlone agrees. “There is a large transient population throughout the Valley. This adversely affects academic testing

Valley Residents Who Moved in the Last Year, 2014



Source: *The 2016 Valley Community Index, Page 9, Figure 2.09*

results such as PSAT and SAT scores,” she says. “It also affects our ability to provide a consistent and quality education for students belonging to transient families because they move from town-to-town and district-to-district so frequently.”

The Derby Youth Services Bureau supports schools, social workers, and guidance departments through outreach. “We visit with families in their homes,” says Saccu. “We work with them to gain insights into the root causes behind their child not attending school. Everyone has the same goal - to make sure

that each student has the ability to be in the classroom to receive a high quality education.”

Merlone hopes that these once-truant students can ultimately realize their fullest learning potential.

“Lifelong learners develop a healthy perspective for college to career opportunities,” Merlone says. “National data trends state that 60 percent of the jobs that are offered by 2020 will require post-secondary education. In the Valley, we are committed to ensuring that these opportunities for success exist for all of our students.”

Featured Fund

William C. and Elaine N. Nimons Family Fund

Ansonia is a special place for life-long residents Bill and Elaine Nimons. Ansonia, has been good to the Nimons family in many ways. Now, they are returning the favor.

During Bill's time as a banker, through his involvement with many nonprofits, and service on Ansonia's Board of Education, he watched generous people and organizations with great intentions for the Valley come and go.

"I have belonged to many community organizations throughout the years," Bill recalls. "I saw the good being done for many in need and still saw an opportunity to make an impact."

For Bill and Elaine that opportunity was creating a permanent legacy of their own for the community they call home.

The couple chose to create a donor advised fund at the Valley

"We wanted to give back and thought that supporting youth was the best way to make a meaningful difference. VCF was an excellent way to achieve our charitable goals."

- Bill Nimons

Community Foundation (VCF) to support the things they care about, especially Ansonia's youth.



Elaine and Bill Nimons use their fund to help their community's youth access opportunities.

"We assist organizations that directly receive and distribute funds to help the most vulnerable," Bill says. "We wanted to give back and thought that supporting youth was the best way to make a meaningful difference. VCF was an excellent way to achieve our charitable goals."

The couple continue to grow the William C. and Elaine N. Nimons Family Fund through annual contributions. They often recommend grants from the Fund to the Ansonia Public Schools, supporting a variety of programs, such as the High School's College Prep SAT Program.

"My children, wife, and her siblings all attended Ansonia High School and received a thorough education there," Bill says. "Years later, we still feel students receive a quality and diverse education through the Ansonia Public Schools."

Members of the Nimons family have special appreciation for being lifelong learners and believe that education is a critically important element of a young person's life.

"One must have opportunities to learn both in and out of the classroom," says Bill.



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Valley Community Foundation Awards \$881,000 in Single- and Multi-Year Grants

The Valley Community Foundation (VCF) made history this fall with its largest multi-year grant commitment yet.

Eleven nonprofits received \$881,000 through the responsive grantmaking cycle.

“There has never been a more important time to support local nonprofits facing challenges from state and federal budget uncertainties, projected to have short and long term effects on services,” says VCF Board Chair Alan Tyma.

2017 VCF Responsive Grants

Boys & Girls Club of the Lower Naugatuck Valley: general operating support for cultural, recreational, physical, and educational programs to Valley youth. \$120,000

Central Connecticut Coast YMCA: general operating support for the Valley YMCA programming that builds healthy spirit, mind, and body for Valley residents. \$90,000

Griffin Hospital: support to update radiation oncology equipment at the Center for Cancer Care. \$25,000



The Housatonic Council, Boy Scouts of America received \$100,000 in general operating support for scouting programs for Valley youth.

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

Massaro Community Farm, Inc.: general operating support to maintain a historic farm using organic practices, providing fresh produce and building community. \$60,000

The Responsive Grants program is funded by an annual grant from VCF's partner in philanthropy, The Community Foundation for Greater New Haven as well as grants from VCF's unrestricted and field of interest funds. Many VCF donor advised fundholders also contribute to the process. In 2017, these include: the Agape Fund, the Salvatore and Linda Tiano Coppola Family Fund, the Mary Fund, the Sally and Dominick Thomas Fund, the John Tyma Fund, the Warichar Family Fund, and the John and Laura Zaprzalka

Online Journalism Project, Inc. to provide general operating support for The Valley Independent Sentinel. \$120,000

Salvation Army, Greater Valley Corps: for the Emergency Assistance program (Client Choice Food Pantry, Bread and Pastry Program, Thanksgiving food distribution, Back-to-School backpack distribution, clothing and furniture vouchers, rental and utility assistance). \$60,000

Shelton Economic Development Corporation: general operating support to advance the economic development and public welfare of the City of Shelton. \$10,000

Shelton Historical Society, Inc.: general operating support for the preservation of items of Shelton's history, educational programming and the maintenance of a museum and its collections. \$34,000

TEAM, Inc.: general operating support for multigenerational service delivery system focused on support services, early childhood, and elderly services. \$160,000

Valley Council for Health and Human Services: for the creation of a Valley Food Bank Network to raise awareness of food insecurity in the Valley, implement best practices at food pantries, and enhance services to individuals. The Valley United Way is acting as the fiscal sponsor. \$42,000

Sponsored Events

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

Ansonia High School - \$500 for the Fall State in Boston.

Ansonia Rotary Club - \$300 for its annual Civic Awards dinner.

The Boys and Girls Club of the Lower Naugatuck Valley - \$2,500 for the 16th annual Commodore Hull Road Race in Derby and Shelton.

Celebrate Shelton - \$1,000 for the Community Tree Lighting.

Derby Historical Society - \$850 for the Derby Historical Society's 27th Annual Fundraiser.

Friends of the Ansonia Nature Center - \$500 for Autumn Fest.

Junior Achievement of Western Connecticut, Inc. - \$1,000 for the Job Shadow Event at Griffin Hospital.

Seymour Christmas Parade Association - \$1,000 for the Seymour Christmas Parade.

Treasured Time - \$250 for the Holiday Shopping Extravaganza.

United Methodist Homes - \$500 for an Enchanted Trick or Treat Trail and fall activities at Wesley Village in Shelton.

Valley United Way - \$500 for the Valley Council Annual Breakfast Meeting.

Needs & Opportunities Grants

Father McKenna's St. Vincent DePaul Thrift Shop and Food Bank - \$7,069 for surveillance system upgrades.

Family Re-entry - \$3,000 for an intensive post-conviction, domestic violence intervention program for men in the Valley.



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Good News About the Valley

Scholarships Create Educational Opportunities while Honoring Loved Ones

The Valley has a very rich history of families who settled here and have stayed for generations. Some liken the region to a large extended family. It's not uncommon to have aunts, uncles, or cousins living just a few exits away on Route 8. With a special appreciation for remaining such a close-knit community, many families consider having their name honored by establishing a scholarship.

For some, a scholarship not only pays tribute to their family but it can also memorialize their name at a local high school. Whether it's participation on a sports team, the longevity of family history, or the lifetime friends that were made, establishing a scholarship to benefit local high schools is an investment in our community's future and reflects the value of higher education.

Civic organizations, such as Rotary Clubs, and local businesses have a tradition of providing annual scholarships to our local high schools, and now more individuals and families are helping to create a pool of permanent scholarship funds. With permanent or endowed scholarships, the schools know they will have money each year to support their graduating seniors.

The Valley Community Foundation (VCF) has been working with the schools to manage and administer scholarship funds. Rather than a high school holding the scholarship money in a CD or savings account,



Scholarship funds can be created with a broad range of assets such as cash, appreciated stocks, real estate, personal property. For more about how you can create a scholarship fund, give us a call at 203-751-9162 or visit www.valleyfoundation.org.

the scholarship is established, managed, and invested with the Foundation. The high school continues to select the recipients of the scholarship since they know their students, but they save time and money by not administering individual accounts. Additionally, the money is invested in a large investment pool and yields a better return. The scholarship fund and all future earnings is a permanent source of community capital, helping to do good work forever.

Donors need simply to select eligibility requirements for the scholarship based on a student's field of study, academic achievements, extracurricular activities, financial need, background, or geography.