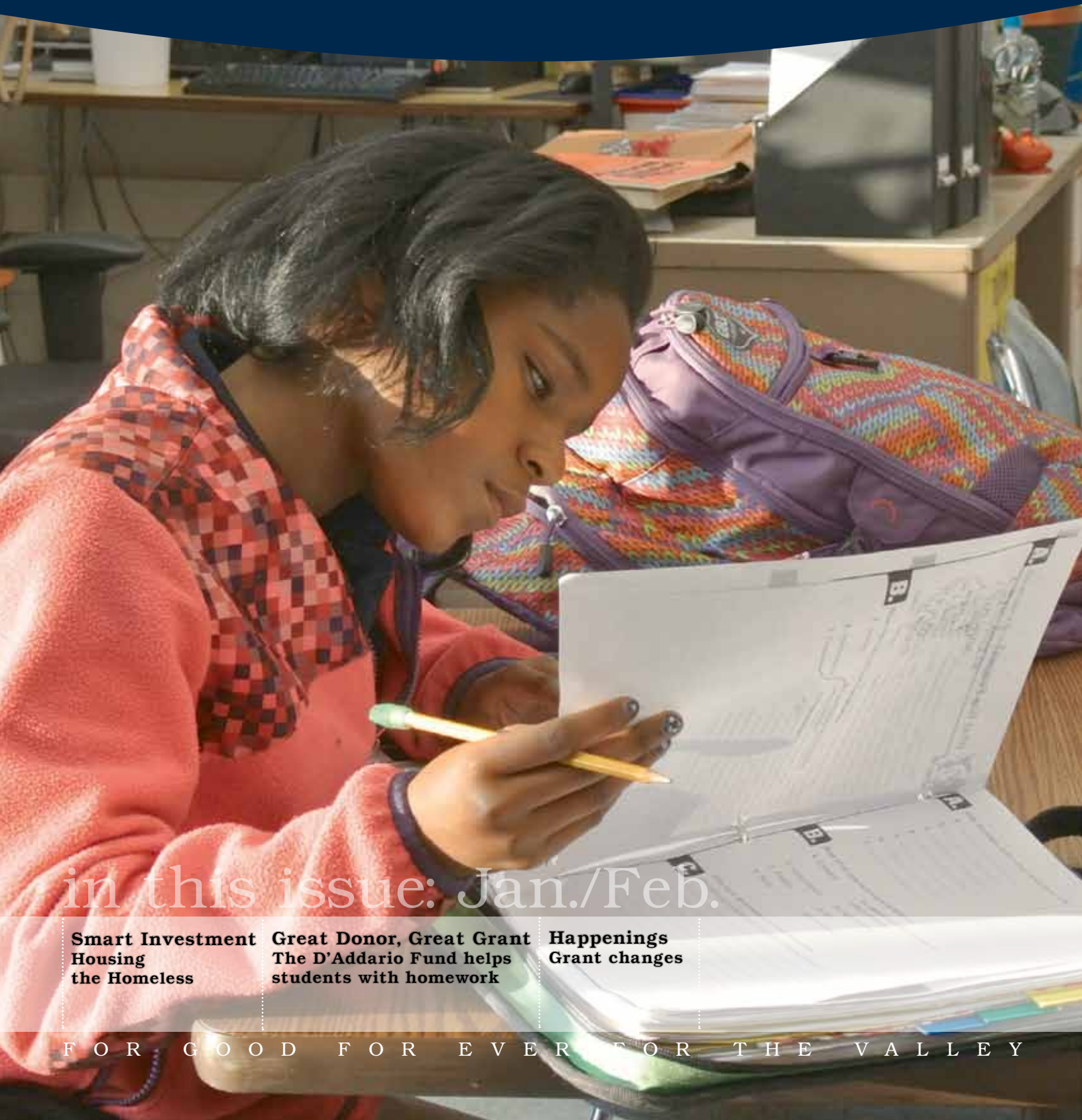


Legacy *Matters*



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Smart Investment: Housing the Homeless

Our donors address Valley problems & solutions

You should know:
With the help of our donors, Valley Community Foundation grants support resident services at Spooner House. A VCF grant also helped Spooner House move, in 2008, into a bigger and better building to serve more clients in a welcome setting.



"They can't afford a place to live, and they've worn out their welcome with friends or family. Shelter is a last resort. Nobody wants to come to a shelter."

— Susan Agamy, Executive Director of Spooner House and Area Congregations Together



"We make sure we're all on the same page, and together we make sure nothing falls through the cracks for the residents."

— Nathan Kyder, Visiting Nurse Association social worker

Homelessness is more complicated than just not having a home. People with low incomes and high housing costs are at risk, especially when confronted with another issue, such as mental or physical disabilities, substance abuse, divorce, domestic abuse or a lack of education.

Because each case is different many area agencies coordinate care and use their expertise to help homeless clients.

That's why Spooner House--the only homeless shelter in the Valley--asks residents to stay for six months. During those six months, a case worker helps the resident set goals and get connected to appropriate services to get back on the path to self-sufficiency.

Nathan Kyder, a social worker with the Visiting Nurse Association, visits residents at Spooner House weekly.

Kyder is currently helping a man whose chronic pain is making it difficult to support his family. The pain and frustration are making him depressed. It's common, Kyder says, to see individuals struggling with multiple issues at once.

Kyder is trying to connect the man with a pain management doctor while Kyder is helping the man deal with his depression. Spooner House and other organizations often collaborate to help residents.

"We make sure we're all on the same page, and together we make sure nothing falls through the cracks for the residents," he says.

Despite reports of an improved economy, the number of people experiencing homelessness has continued to grow. Statewide, there's been a 7% increase in homeless shelter populations since 2008.

Some of that increase is coming from an educated middle class who've lost their jobs and have nowhere else to turn.

"What we're hearing is that they can't afford a place to live, and they've worn out their welcome with friends and family," says Spooner House executive director Susan Agamy. "The shelter is a last resort."

Spooner House has 36 beds for long-term stays and an additional six for overnight stays during the winter. Spooner is one of the few shelters that serves families with children. They also serve single men and women.

Agamy estimates that about two-thirds of their residents have addiction or mental health issues. "Mental health stands in the way of everything," she says. "Before that's addressed you can't do anything else."

"Our goal has always been to help our clients break that cycle so when they leave Spooner, they have skills to maintain housing and self-sufficiency for themselves and their families," says Agamy. "We're not just a warm place to sleep."

That's what Kevin was looking for when he called Spooner House. Kevin is a 53-year-old machinist and an alcoholic.

Kevin moved from Providence to Bridgeport in 2006 for a job. A year later he lost the job when he relapsed. "From then on, I've been in and out of treatment centers," he says. "I get cleaned up, get a job and then I relapse."

When he relapses, he often loses his job, and his place to live. Recently, he stayed on a friend's couch for two months while waiting for a spot at Spooner House.

No alcohol or drugs are allowed at Spooner House, and Kevin's been attending Alcoholics Anonymous meetings.

"They're going to try and help me," he says of Spooner. "I am incredibly grateful."

Kevin has also been meeting with Latesha Johnson, BH Care's homeless outreach case manager. She helped Kevin sign up for state health care and unemployment benefits, and gave him a clothing voucher for My Sister's Closet in Ansonia.

After connecting people to benefits, Johnson begins to address mental health issues and helps residents to overcome obstacles to self-sufficiency.

"We all work together, like an action team" Johnson says of the organizations that partner with Spooner to help the homeless.

How you can help:

* Donate professional clothing and shoes to My Sister's Place.

* If you're an employer, give a homeless applicant a chance.

* Support organizations that help the homeless.

Great Donor, Great Grant

The D'Addario Family supports The Charger Club



Left: Teacher Yvette Bailey helps with homework. Right: Tom and son Danny D'Addario are supporting the Charger Club through their Fund.

Homework is being done more frequently by Ansonia students, thanks to Tom D'Addario and his family.

"I didn't do my homework before," says Hector, an eighth grade student. But, since joining the Charger Club, at Ansonia Middle School, Hector has been doing his homework every day during the after-school club.

As a result, Hector's grades have gone up. "My mom is really proud," he says.

"This sounded like an important program. It's having an impact on these kids," says Tom D'Addario who created the D'Addario Family Fund. Together with VCF, the D'Addarios are helping to keep the Charger Club running.

The Charger Club serves more than 90 students at all three Ansonia middle schools. Students are invited based on Connecticut Mastery Test scores. The club takes students with very low and very high scores. The goal is to improve the low test scores and give leadership roles to students with high scores.

After school, students grab a healthy snack and then split into groups of 10 to do homework while a teacher helps as needed. It's a relaxed, chatty and fun environment. After homework, the students go to the Boys & Girls Club.

Parents are also involved. Studies show that when parents are involved in their child's education, grades, attendance and graduation rates go up while disciplinary problems go down.

During the parent component, parents and their children eat dinner together once a week. After dinner they split up: parents learn about teen development and students pick a discussion

topic. Then parent and child have one-on-one discussions on the chosen topic.

"He talks to me more now," says parent Maureen Maine of her 13 year-old son. Maine says she's seen her son's self confidence and grades improve since joining the club three years ago.

Through her interactions with the club Maine says her relationship with her son's teachers is even stronger. "I feel very supported," she says.

The Charger Club is funded by a five-year state grant. The first three years were funded 100%; the fourth year was 75% and the fifth 50%.

This is the Charger Club's fifth year of the grant. Because so many students in the club are from low-income families, "we couldn't ask them to pay for the club," says Dawn Schwarz, the club's assistant project director.

To avoid asking students and families to cover the costs, Ansonia Public Schools turned to the Valley Community Foundation.

VCF received so many requests to fund worthy projects this year, and the requests totalled more than the available grant dollars. That's when the Foundation asked fund holders for help.

"It just seemed like a good fit," says D'Addario. The family supports many area nonprofits and programs through their Fund and the Mario D'Addario car dealership.

D'Addario's father, Mario, moved to Bridgeport at age 10 from Italy "with nothing. He worked hard and started a business," says D'Addario. "If I can do something for another family to let their kids achieve their goals then that's worthwhile."

New for 2014

We need your help! VCF is revamping one of our grant processes. Can you help us spread the word?

Starting this year, the Valley Community Grants program is changing. These grants will now be more responsive to small, grassroots community organizations with 2 or less full time staff that serve Ansonia, Derby, Oxford, Seymour and/or Shelton.

Grants can be for new or recurring programs and will support civic and community engagement efforts.

Grants range from \$250 to \$2,500; VCF's total budget for the 2014 program is \$40,000.

"VCF's Program Committee has spent the past several months reviewing the Foundation's grant programs," said Program Committee Chair Lynne Bassett Perry. "With the community grants process we really wanted to assist those small, local groups doing such great work. The application can either be completed online or by hand – we wanted to make it as easy as possible so that all that are interested can participate. These funds are truly for those whose work can benefit from targeted funding through this program."

Applications are due Friday, March 7. For more information, visit www.valleyfoundation.org.

Celebrating 10 Years of Giving!

Back in 2004 The Community Foundation for Greater New Haven created the Valley Community Foundation to address the Valley's needs and opportunities.

A total of seven philanthropic funds were started that first year by individuals.

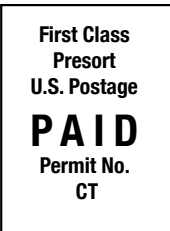
A decade later, there are more than 100 funds and the Foundation and its donors have made an indelible mark on the Valley: In our 10 years, VCF has made 1,401 grants totaling \$5.5 million to support the Valley.

We plan to celebrate our decennial at a party later this year. Keep your eyes open for your invitation!



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Good News About the Valley



A Bigger Collection

Joyce Ceccarelli, Ansonia Public Library's head librarian, is busy adding new large-print books and audio books to the library's collection, thanks to a grant from the Valley Community Foundation.

Ceccarelli, who suffers from vision difficulty due to Multiple Sclerosis, says the large print book section is the most popular at the library due to a high number of elderly readers and readers with vision impediments.



Keeping the Records Straight

Volunteers at the Seymour Historical Society are busy scanning and cataloguing thousands of important local historical documents, photos and other items using software purchased with a grant from the Valley Community Foundation.

The long-term goal, says volunteer Marian O'Keefe (pictured with a book of letters from a Civil War soldier from Seymour), is to make the collection available online for everyone to access and learn about Seymour's rich history.



Feeding the Hungry

Christ Episcopal Church's food bank provided 64,000 meals in 2013! In 2014, they may provide even more. A Valley Community Foundation grant supports the food bank, which is serving more clients more efficiently, says Meme Yocher (pictured with The Rev. Richard Beattie). Since partnering with the CT Food Bank they allow clients to "shop" for food: families choose what they want so less food is wasted.

And, thanks to The Katharine Matthies Foundation, Bank of America, N.A., Trustee, the food bank will be significantly expanding its food storage area.