in this issue: May-Aug. 2015

Smart Investment: Collecting Community Knowledge
Partner Spotlight: The Community Foundation for Greater New Haven
Good News: Community Grants Awarded

Legacy Matters

FOR GOOD FOR EVER FOR THE VALLEY
Community development and data collection: the two may not seem to have much in common, but leaders from across the Valley are coming together to collect neighborhood-level data over the next several years to better understand the changing needs, opportunities and demographics. This data collection process will culminate in a 2016 Valley Community Index report, which will be updated with new information every three years in a collective effort to maintain an accurate pulse on the region.

In mid-2014, the Valley Community Foundation (VCF) began organizing community conversations to discuss the need for a single-source index that would expand the scope of the Valley CARES Quality of Life Report (2010) and assess changes in trends identified through the Mt. Auburn Associates’ Addressing Needs & Opportunities in the Lower Naugatuck Valley: A Funding Strategy (2001), which was created for the Valley Advisory Committee of The Community Foundation for Greater New Haven (TCF).

Released in April, The Valley Now: A 2015 Snapshot spotlights trends in the Valley using existing data as a baseline indicators report. The Snapshot reveals changing demographics, a shifting employment landscape and regional health trends among the Valley’s population.

VCF enlisted the support of DataHaven, a nonprofit with a 25-year history of compiling and interpreting public data, along with several dozen community leaders from the five Valley towns, as well as representatives from Beacon Falls and Naugatuck. The addition of these two towns, which were included in the region as part of the All-American City Award in 2000, is meant to provide continuity and a historical comparison to the study of trends within the region.

“These cross-sector working groups reviewed existing data and decided what information would be most meaningful to include in the report,” says DataHaven Executive Director Mark Abraham. “We continue to be impressed by the turnout at these convenings, and by how excited these organizations are about collecting and using localized information.”

“This is an impressive committee, representing important community groups interested in utilizing the survey results and the upcoming data report,” says Will Ginsberg, VCF Board member and President & CEO of TCF. “Strong philanthropy in any region starts with strong leadership. The Valley has always had strong, passionate leaders who are dedicated to the success of their community.”

DataHaven and the Siena College Research Institute are conducting a statewide phone survey through October, to collect wellbeing data on a variety of topics. As part of the multi-year data collection process, more than 1,000 Valley residents will be surveyed and are encouraged to “answer the call” from a 518 area code. The results will be featured in the Valley Community Index.

“Up to date demographic information is crucial to effective decision-making and helps us build and update our long-term strategic planning initiatives,” says Seymour First Selectman and Advisory Committee member Kurt Miller.

Griffin Hospital is a major partner in moving this project forward and will provide critical support with health-related data. The Valley Community Index will also be produced to fulfill the hospital’s Community Health Needs Assessment requirements. This information is expected to help Valley nonprofits leverage grant dollars and funding at both state and federal levels. Groups such as the Naugatuck Valley Council of Governments and the Greater Valley Chamber of Commerce also recognize the value of this endeavor.

“It sensitizes us, as a business community, to what some of the challenges are in the region,” says Chamber President and Advisory Committee member Bill Purcell. “The data provides a solid foundation for the Chamber to chart its course. I hope other organizations will also recognize the value, as we all have our part to play.”

“My hope is that it will drive new philanthropy to the Valley,” explains VCF Board member and Program Committee Chair Lynne Bassett Perry. “We want new donors to see the value in our community and create a measurable impact.”
Improving the quality of life of residents is a core value among community foundations. But, how does a community foundation determine the best course of action for doing that?

“It begins with establishing a baseline of the current circumstances through quality data collection. The Valley region has always been a leader in wanting to understand their community,” says Christina Ciociola, Senior Vice President for Grantmaking & Strategy at The Community Foundation for Greater New Haven (TCF).

“They were ahead of many of us in taking a comprehensive approach in studying multiple facets of the community at once.”

Ciociola refers to the long history of data collection and reporting in the Valley, including when TCF established the Valley Advisory Committee in 1993 to assess needs and opportunities in the five Valley towns it served and encourage grant applications to TCF.

Funds such as those established by the bequests of Frank and Ross Gates at TCF, for the benefit of residents living in the Valley, provided the dollars to meet those needs, but not necessarily a plan.

The Mt. Auburn Associate’s Report Addressing Needs & Opportunities in the Lower Naugatuck Valley: A Funding Strategy (2001) was commissioned by TCF to recommend comprehensive strategies for grantmaking in the Valley.

“Mt. Auburn was a guiding principle for TCF’s grantmaking and actually led to the formation of the Valley Community Foundation (VCF), because the report identified a need for building philanthropy in the Valley,” says Sarah Fabish, Vice President for Grantmaking & Scholarships at TCF.

“Ongoing support from TCF has been critical in better understanding the diverse and changing needs of our Valley residents,” says Sharon Closius, VCF President & CEO.

Recently, TCF supported the Shelton Economic Development Corporation (SEDC) study of the Naugatuck Valley Corridor in order to create an up-to-date Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) and successfully access federal funding for economic development.

“This strategy for the 19-town and city region of the Naugatuck River Valley is all-inclusive,” says SEDC President Jimmy Ryan, who also serves on the Boards for both TCF and VCF. “It’s about economic development, transportation, housing, brownfields and so many other community issues. And we wouldn’t be able to do this without the seed money from TCF and the ongoing support from VCF.”

Currently, TCF’s funding of the 2016 Greater New Haven Community Wellbeing Index will assist in the collection of data to help inform nonprofits, donors, businesses, councils, and legislators as to the needs and quality of life of the Greater New Haven area.

“TCF and VCF are partners, in the truest sense of the word, through our grantmaking and our capacity building for nonprofits in the region we both serve,” says TCF President & CEO Will Ginsberg. “We have a partnership that strengthens philanthropy in the Valley in the best ways possible.”
Good News About the Valley

VCF Community Grants Awarded to Support Valley Programs

The Valley Community Foundation (VCF) awarded $33,295 through its Community Grants program to 15 community groups serving the Valley. Applications for VCF’s Community Grants Program are considered through a request for proposal process that occurs in the Spring of each year for groups or organizations that serve Ansonia, Derby, Oxford, Seymour and/or Shelton and have less than 2 full-time or less than 4 part-time staff. Grants can be for new or recurring programs and support civic and community engagement efforts. Grants range from $250 to $2,500.

“VCF is proud to support these 15 organizations with more than $30,000 in Community Grants,” said Sharon Closius, VCF President & CEO.

“Community Grants are responsive to groups that are volunteer or nonprofit in nature with very limited staffing capacity and serve our five-town region. Using this grant support, these small, dedicated organizations can work on issues that make a big difference in our community.”

The 2015 VCF Community Grants were awarded to:

- $2,500 - Annual Thanksgiving Basket Committee
- $1,000 - Ansonia High School/AHS Quilting and Sewing Charity Club
- $2,500 - Ansonia High School/Class of 2018 Advisories
- $2,500 - City of Derby
- $2,500 - College Access for All Kids
- $2,500 - Colonial Youth Football & Cheer
- $1,500 - Derby Historical Society
- $2,500 - Friends of Derby Neck Library
- $2,500 - North Star
- $2,500 - Oil Drum Art
- $2,500 - Seymour Historical Society
- $1,695 - Southford Falls Quilt Guild
- $2,500 - Valley Deaf Club
- $2,500 - Youth to Youth Peer Advocates

For a complete description of each grant award, please visit www.valleyfoundation.org.