Informed decision making has significant impact on a community’s well-being. Knowing where needs and opportunities exist and having data to support plans for change is essential for long-term success.

*Shining a Spotlight* is an executive summary of the 2016 Valley Community Index: Understanding the Valley Region. It identifies areas where we as a region can “shine a light” on our accomplishments and areas of vulnerability, and encourage collaboration on strategic endeavors to enhance the quality of life in the Valley.

The 2016 Community Index is part of an ongoing tradition of providing comprehensive socioeconomic, education, health, and well-being data of the Valley Region. The Index was developed through an inclusive and collaborative process, reflecting the strong community engagement of Valley leaders who are deeply committed to preserving and strengthening the resiliency, determination, compassion, and overall well-being that has long characterized this region.

Lead authors of the Index, DataHaven, provided data collected from federal, state, and local agencies, as well as information collected from Valley residents as part of the statewide 2015 DataHaven Community Wellbeing Survey.

This executive summary captures the essence of the full report. Continued growth requires a collective effort of individuals, key stakeholders, community leaders, and investors to drill even deeper into the data that has been provided in order to develop strategies for long-term success.
Since 1990, the population in the Valley increased by 12 percent, faster than Connecticut. The Valley’s minority population doubled.

By age group, population change was relatively stable in Ansonia, Derby, and Seymour. Beacon Falls and Oxford populations grew across all age groups. Ansonia and Derby have the most racially and ethnically diverse populations; the largest number of self-identified racial and ethnic minorities lives in Ansonia (25 percent of all minorities in the Valley).

By 2014, 11 percent of Valley residents were foreign-born (just below 14 percent statewide). Immigrants bring to the Valley the cultural perspectives of approximately 90 home countries from every region around the world.

From 1990 to 2010, the population of children (ages 0-17) living in the Valley hardly increased. The number of young adults (ages 18-34) decreased.

The population of middle-aged adults (ages 35-64) grew the most.

One in three children identified as a member of a racial or ethnic minority in 2014, compared to one in ten in 1990.

Fewer children and more aging adults have made the total Valley population older in general, trends that mirror statewide changes. The growth in older adults is occurring nationally and internationally and is due to aging Baby Boomers, who began turning 65 in 2011.

This maturing population creates opportunities for a larger volunteer base but also presents challenges. Ninety percent of seniors want to age in-place in their home and community. This will require alternative modes of transportation, an increased need for access to in-home services and resources to remodel older homes to accommodate their physical needs.
The seven Valley towns share a common history and identity, a spirited community culture, and strong institutions, which have a longstanding reputation for working together to identify community needs and develop responsive strategies. Collective impact is intrinsic to community leaders in the Valley as illustrated by the following:

The Valley United Way’s Volunteer Action Center—one of the few in the country, and including corporate, individual, and youth volunteers—collectively volunteered at least 42,500 hours during 2015, which has a monetary equivalence of approximately $1,140,000.

Valley municipalities collaborated to receive recognition as the 20-town Naugatuck Valley Corridor, a federally-designated Economic Development District (EDD). Through EDD work, economic growth is more evenly distributed across the Valley, including the remediation of at least 303 acres of abandoned industrial sites or brownfields.

Early childhood collaboratives bring services to children and families throughout the region to ensure that access to education, health, safety, and family well-being activities are available to all Valley children and families.

The Valley United Way’s Volunteer Action Center—outpacing zero percent statewide growth.

From 2002 to 2014, 2,500 net jobs were added in Valley towns, a growth rate of six percent (outpacing zero percent statewide growth).

The largest number of jobs were added in health care, administrative and waste management, and company management. Finance and insurance, as well as manufacturing, lost the most jobs.

In 2015, the unemployment rate was 6.1 percent, just above the state rate of 5.6 percent.

Wages at Valley jobs grew by an inflation-adjusted six percent, faster than four percent growth statewide.

Over the next several years, local developers are projected to build hundreds of housing units in mixed-use developments to attract current and prospective residents.

Reclaiming contaminated properties, known as brownfields, is one of the largest opportunities for growth in the Valley.

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Socioeconomic disparities are rising, suggesting that Valley residents are not faring equally well in their education, employment, health, and well-being.

Socioeconomic status is measured as a combination of education, income, and occupation and reveals inequities in access to and distribution of resources. Residents living in low-income households report greater levels of severe financial stress, such as difficulty in paying for housing, childcare, and food.

Low socioeconomic status and its related issues—such as lower educational achievement, poverty, and poor health—ultimately affect everyone.

In the Valley, these factors disproportionately impact the diverse towns of Ansonia, Derby, and Naugatuck.

The United Way of Connecticut found that a typical family of four in the Valley needed $66,088 in 2012 to cover the basic expenses of housing, childcare, food, transportation, and healthcare.

Approximately one in three Valley households earn less than what they need to cover all necessary living costs.

**WHAT IS IT?**

People living in poverty have annual household incomes below the federal poverty guideline.

Under January 2016 guidelines, this is equivalent to $16,020 per year for a family of two, or $24,300 for a family of four.

Low-income households have annual incomes less than two times the federal poverty guideline.

Cost-burdened households spend more than 30 percent of total income on housing costs.

Only 37 percent of residents earning less than $30,000/year report they are in good health.

Adults with low household incomes are substantially more likely to have used the emergency room more than once in the past year.

37% of low-income residents are in good health.

9% of the Valley population lives in poverty.

20% of Valley residents are low-income.

39% of households are cost-burdened.

17% of households are severely cost-burdened.

1 in 3 workers had challenges finding employment, particularly those with less education.
The four-year high school graduation rate for low-income students is lower: 75 percent, versus 92 percent for non-low-income students.

Nearly one third of Valley residents report challenges in finding employment, particularly those with lower levels of educational attainment.

Sixteen percent of Valley workers without a high school diploma were unemployed, versus five percent of workers with a bachelor’s degree or more.

Seventy-five percent of Valley high school graduates who enroll at state or community colleges are placed in remedial courses to relearn high school material.

Most enrollments in adult education were for either a high school completion class (59 percent) or English as a Second Language (37 percent).
Just over half of Valley students pass third grade reading assessments. Less than one third pass eighth grade math assessments.

The Valley has a significant shortage of regulated childcare for very young children; there is less than one slot for every five children age 0-2.

The number of high-needs students in the Valley varies widely by school district.

Pass rates on school assessment tests vary widely by town.

Chronic absence and truancy are precursors to school drop-out and academic failure.

Early experiences matter—the prenatal months and first five years of life are a period of rapid social and intellectual development for young children. By age three, the brain has grown to 82 percent of its adult size; by age five, this number jumps to 90 percent. Regardless of socioeconomic background, positive interactions at home, in the community, and in other early childhood settings improve young children’s ability to learn, self-express, and engage with others.

Strong language and learning skills by the end of kindergarten set the foundation for reading proficiently by the end of third grade, enabling students to shift 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. Frequent absenteeism and transiency can further disrupt or delay student learning.

WHAT IS IT?
Chronic absence is defined as missing more than 10 percent of school days for any reason.

K-3 CHRONIC ABSENCE, 2013-14*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Town</th>
<th>Absence Rate</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ansonia</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Derby</td>
<td>13%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Naugatuck</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oxford</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seymour</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shelton</td>
<td>7%</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

* The chronic absence rate was not available for Regional SD 16, which serves students from Beacon Falls and Prospect, CT.

WHAT IS IT?
Smarter Balance Assessment Consortium (SBAC) is a standardized test that replaced the CT Mastery Test (CMT) in 2015. The pass rate constitutes proficiency.

* Regional SD 16 serves students from Beacon Falls and Prospect, CT.
Leading causes of premature death differ among age and socioeconomic groups, but many are considered preventable.

An individual's good health and well-being has a positive ripple effect on his/her family, community, and workplace. Self-rated health among Valley residents is ranked high, but varies across the Valley by income, age, and geography. Mental health and physical health are closely connected, and poor mental health can become a disability that has significant impacts on employment, behavioral health, and overall well-being. Prevention is no longer just the right thing to do morally and ethically for our citizens, it is also the right thing to do to preserve the community’s economic viability.

**WHY IT MATTERS**

Asthma and obesity are chronic diseases that contribute to other health conditions and place significant burdens on overall health and quality of life.

**IN THE SPOTLIGHT**

**Asthma in the Valley, 2015**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>CT</th>
<th>Valley</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>13%</td>
<td></td>
<td>13%</td>
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</table>

**Obesity in the Valley, 2015**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>CT</th>
<th>Valley</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>26%</td>
<td></td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
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**Valley, by income**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>&lt;$30K</th>
<th>$30-100K</th>
<th>&gt;$100K</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>21%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Valley, by town**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Town</th>
<th>CT</th>
<th>Valley</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ansonia</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Derby</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Naugatuck</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shelton</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Survey estimates for Beacon Falls, Oxford and Seymour are not listed here due to smaller sample sizes and higher margins of error for estimates for those towns.

**DID YOU KNOW?**

In addition to two rivers that attract boating, swimming, fishing, and scenic respite, the Valley has approximately 75 town-operated parks and recreational facilities and six state parks, which give access to trails, playgrounds, sports facilities, and nature centers.

Sixty percent of Valley residents report they are in good health, similar to statewide levels.

Forty-six percent of Valley residents earning less than $30,000 per year postponed or did not get needed medical care in the past year.

One in five Valley women who gave birth had non-adequate prenatal care during pregnancy.

Leading causes of death in the Valley are considered preventable—including heart disease, lung disease, and diabetes.

Rates of asthma and obesity are higher among low-income residents.

Among older seniors (age 80+), 25 percent suffer from depression; 11 percent battle anxiety.

Almost one in six students in grades 7, 9, and 11 reported having thoughts of hurting themselves.

**IN GRADES 7, 9, AND 11 THOUGHT ABOUT HURTING THEMSELVES**

1 IN 6
Transportation continues to be a major concern for Valley residents in terms of access to jobs and needed services.

Approximately one-quarter of the Valley workforce had jobs in the Valley; the rest commuted outside the region. Valley residents earning less than $30,000 are five times more likely to use public transit or walk than those who make more.

Older adults who do not drive can use ADA-certified public transit to travel. However, all of these services are “curb-to-curb,” not “door-to-door.”

Public transit links the Valley to New Haven, Waterbury, Bridgeport, and beyond through buses, trains, and free reserve-ride services. However, service is infrequent—less than once an hour, or required to be scheduled in advance—and mostly limited to stops along the Route 8 corridor.

Current improvements to Valley transportation infrastructure will help residents without cars gain better access to jobs. State investments in Metro-North’s Waterbury Branch Line will increase Valley train service to Bridgeport and Waterbury.

IN THE SPOTLIGHT

We would like to thank the lead sponsors who made this data collection effort possible: Bassett Family Fund; Griffin Health Services, Inc.; Katharine Matthies Foundation, Bank of America, N.A., Trustee; and Valley United Way. We would also like to acknowledge the dedicated work of DataHaven and Morrison Downs Associates.

For a complete listing of funders and members of the Advisory Committee, and to view a full version of the 2016 Valley Community Index, visit www.valleyfoundation.org.

For more information, please call the Valley Community Foundation at 203-751-9162.

WHAT CAN YOU DO?
Read the full Community Index report.

Utilize the Index data to help create cross-sector solutions.

Stay informed about key issues affecting our region.

Help instill the importance of community engagement in all our citizens.

Become an advocate for change in your local municipality or school district and with state policymakers.

Participate in local and regional community conversations.

Focus your resources, time, and talents to have the greatest impact for those most in need.

At the Valley Community Foundation, we believe an informed community is directly connected to the long-term good of the region, today and for generations to come. It is undeniable that we are all connected and what happens to the least of us, happens to all of us. Together, we are all like colorful threads woven into a beautiful tapestry. What we want most of all is to continue to maintain and improve the quality of life for our residents.

Understanding the Valley and building a stronger community starts with knowledge. The more that we know about our region, the better we are able to engage with each other in meaningful dialogues about the pulse of the Valley and what actions are needed to create a more vibrant community.