



Meeting Needs | Changing Lives

SEVCA

SOUTHEASTERN VERMONT COMMUNITY ACTION

2015–16 Annual Report

Executive Director's Message

It seems so obvious that it feels clichéd to say it, but not saying it would be (speaking of clichés) ignoring the elephant in the room: "What a wild and crazy year it was, huh?" The political circus that was our national election seemed to permeate every aspect of our lives last year, and the results are continuing to do so even more dramatically. And there's no sign of that abating anytime in the near future.

Despite that, SEVCA continued, as always, to provide vital, high quality services to relieve and reduce the hardships of poverty and help people achieve stability and self-reliance. 2015-16 was unusual in some respects though; e.g., the demand for and level of services provided decreased from the previous year due to a number of factors, most notably the very mild winter and low heating fuel prices, and the continued improvement in the economy. As a result, the number and dollar amount of Crisis Fuel assists were significantly lower than the previous year, as were the number of emergency services provided overall and by several other programs.

However, other needs and the number of households served remained high and continued to grow, including: Emergency Housing Assistance, indicating the deepening affordable housing crisis and risk of homelessness; Emergency Heating System Repair & Replacement, reflecting the growing problem of old and deteriorating furnaces; Health Navigator, highlighting the ongoing and

increasing need for help with finding and maintaining adequate and affordable health insurance; and Thrift Store vouchers, pointing to many people's unending lack of resources to afford clothing, furniture and basic household needs.

At SEVCA, we will continue to do everything we can to meet these and all the other critical needs faced by vulnerable residents in this area, and to build our capacity to meet those we aren't able to address adequately yet. But now, and even more so next year and beyond, we face the added challenge of people in power who seem not to value our mission and our work, and who have proposed massive cuts in the safety net that keeps people from falling into, or deeper into, poverty and enables them to lift themselves out if they do. And they threaten to keep cutting the funding we depend on to help the people who depend on us.

This is clearly an enormously challenging time, perhaps one of the most serious in our history. But we've met comparable challenges often in the past, and now that we're in our second 50 years of fighting the War on Poverty, we have no intention of letting anyone at any level of government deter us from that mission.

We'll continue to strive to do the same as we've done in the past, do more, and do it better for as long as it takes and as long as we have the public's support to keep at it.



Steve Geller



Steve Geller and Elizabeth McEwen share voter registration information at the 4th Annual Career Expo in Brattleboro.

Board of Directors

October 2015–September 2016

- Amanda Rundle, President
- Donald Skekel, Vice President
- Kathryn Poston, Secretary
- Mandy Giles, Treasurer
- Carson Hoag, Member Emeritus
- Andrew Winter
- Lisa Pitcher
- Gladys Collins
- Suzanne Swanson
- Victoria Sykie
- Mandy Giles



SEVCA's IMPACT

October 2015 – September 2016

Overall, SEVCA served **9,229** people in **4,003** households.

Emergency Services

781 households received **\$244,833** in **crisis fuel assistance**

331 households received **\$146,733** in **emergency housing assistance**

1,321 households (2,940 individuals) received **8,217 diverse services** from our Family Services program

Workforce Development

23 individuals in our *Ready for Work* program benefitted from comprehensive **job readiness education and support**

45 entrepreneurs received **counseling & support** for new or existing businesses

Health

350 households (1,119 individuals) received help to access **affordable health insurance** through the Health Navigator program

Housing and Energy

148 homes were **weatherized** at a total value of **\$1,869,557**

98 homes received **emergency heating system repairs or replacements** valued at **\$168,045**

16 homes received **emergency home repairs** valued at **\$108,850**

Clothing and Household Essentials

414 households obtained **\$16,821** worth of **free clothing and furniture** from our Thrift Stores

Financial Education and Asset-Building

25 households increased their **assets**, earning a total savings match of **\$41,490** via the Individual Development Account program

24 individuals received **training to help them reach their financial goals** in our Financial Fitness program

255 households claimed **\$182,513** in **credits and refunds** via tax preparation assistance

Early Childhood Development

102 families (418 individuals) received **comprehensive early childhood development education & family support** from our Head Start program



When One Door Closes, Another Opens: “I feel truly blessed...I honestly don’t know what I would have done!”



Bellows Falls resident Miguel Orantes experienced a series of traumas and set-backs that left him reeling...but with SEVCA's help, his life is finally stabilizing and his once-positive outlook has returned. Miguel was living in California in 2011 when he was hit

by a train; at first, he was confined to a wheelchair and faced a long battle to regain his ability to walk, which he is able to do now with the assistance of a cane.

After moving to Vermont four years ago, Miguel became seriously ill, losing 60 pounds in a matter of months... eventually, he was diagnosed with lyme disease and received treatment. Meanwhile, he tried to get disability benefits, and it took three years before his case was resolved in his favor. Although he had bought a house, his savings were exhausted and he was unable to work. “A friend kept pushing me to call SEVCA,” Miguel said, and the Family Services department helped him get fuel assistance and 3SquaresVT benefits, which “carried me through until the disability started.”

Another problem Miguel had to cope with was the antiquated boiler, old circulator pump, and lack of insulation in his old Victorian home, making his heating and electric costs unmanageably high. He learned about SEVCA's Weatherization program and quickly applied. SEVCA insulated his attic, ceilings and walls; sealed the basement; serviced the

radiators; and installed a heat pump, causing his electricity bill to plummet from \$200 to \$60/month.

Then, his boiler blew, and, since his disability benefits had just started, his income was over the limit to qualify for state assistance for a new boiler. He obtained a loan from the Windham Foundation to purchase one, but the payment on that loan made it impossible for him to catch up on an outstanding fuel bill from the previous winter. Again, SEVCA's Family Services program stepped in with help to pay the utility arrears.

“I feel truly blessed,” Miguel exclaimed. **“It was a huge relief to be warm in my home and I’m already saving on energy bills.** SEVCA's help came at a low point in my life...I honestly don't know what I would have done!”

Miguel's health has continued to improve, and he currently works part-time. He reflected, “I was always great about fending for myself before my accident...It has been a weird experience to see the reverse side of the coin. But I'm doing better every day, and I'm so thankful!”

Turning the Key to a New Life... “When you have people rooting for you, taking such a big step isn’t as scary.”

Heather, Patrick, and their two young children had a lot of adjustments to make when they moved back to Vermont to be near family who needed them. They initially had to double up with Patrick's father, so finding a place of their own was a high priority. They couldn't find an affordable apartment, so homeownership seemed the best option, and they took a first-time homebuyer's class and began working on repairing their credit. They were also looking for a good pre-school program for their oldest child, Aaron (then 4 years old), and found out about SEVCA's Head Start (HS) program in Springfield.

From the very start of the enrollment process, Heather was surprised and pleased by all the support she received. At her first home visit, the HS family support worker, Katie, asked her about her children, but *also*

about the goals she and Patrick had for their family as a whole. Heather explained that her husband needed a better job and they needed a permanent place to live. As the family pursued those goals, Katie and the HS teachers continued to check in and offer encouragement. Aaron thrived at HS, and successfully transitioned to kindergarten the following year. By then, their younger son, Ethan, had turned 3 and started attending Head Start. Heather volunteered in the classroom whenever she could. She says, **“I love being there! What I like most are the connections I have...the teachers really care about what's going on with us.”** Heather joined the HS Policy Council to get even more involved.

When their first offer on a house fell through, Heather described the experience as “heartbreaking,” but was



Coming Full Circle: "It's time to give back"

Tony Taylor knows what it's like to struggle. Not very long ago, he was unemployed and desperately trying to find a way to put his skills to good use and start his own business. He learned that, in order to succeed, he needed to supplement his own personal drive with a healthy dose of community support. He participated in SEVCA's Micro-Business and Individual Development Account (IDA) matched savings programs, as well as business development programs at VocRehab and Brattleboro Development Credit Corporation (BDCC). "It was important to use whatever resources I could find," he says.

For a few years, Tony worked overtime to establish his business, Master Floor Technicians, which offers a full range of cleaning and property maintenance services in the Brattleboro area. And he began attracting steady contracts and growing his business so that he was able to hire several employees. Years ago, SEVCA's former IDA Coordinator had mentioned that SEVCA recruited Board members from among its program participants, and increasingly he started

thinking that maybe it was time to give back.

"For an organization like SEVCA, who doesn't even know me, to do all they can to help me and my family, that means a lot," Tony says. A father of twin daughters (age 7) and a stepson, he says, "I have always tried to teach them that it's good to volunteer," and he and his children participate in 'Green-up Day' clean-ups every year. He has also served on the Board of the Turning Point Recovery Center, which provides treatment for addiction.

So one day, after participating in an organizational review process at SEVCA, he indicated his interest in joining SEVCA's Board as a Client Sector Representative. The Board Nominating Committee lost no time in contacting him to tell him more about the process, and they invited him to observe a Board meeting. Tony was impressed, and felt he had something valuable to contribute.

"A former client gives the Board a different perspective," he says. **"I can ask the important questions, and not take anything at face value,**



because I know how the programs actually operate and how (decisions) might impact the people SEVCA serves."

SEVCA held an election for the Board position in April, and Tony was officially elected. Tony is used to rolling up his sleeves and getting to work (after all, his business slogan is "You name it, we can clean it!"), and SEVCA welcomes the ideas and energy he will no doubt contribute in his new leadership role.

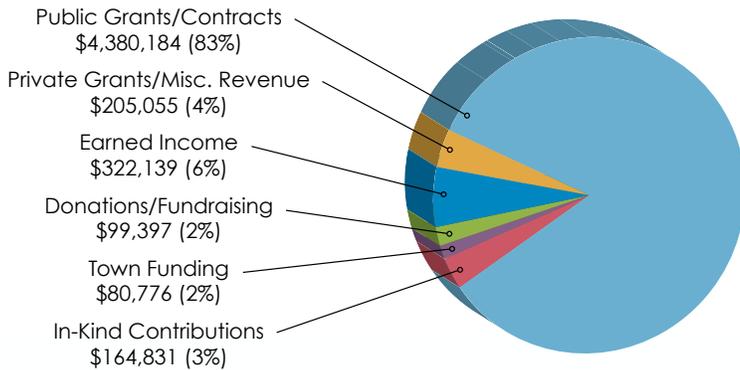
buoyed by support from HS staff and did not give up. Meanwhile, Ethan's assessments showed some speech and language developmental delays, and HS arranged for him to get extra support from a specialist. "I wouldn't have had the resources to help him without the HS program—or even to know that there was a problem," Heather says. "But now I can see his speech is definitely improving."

In April, Heather and her family finally met their goal when they purchased a house in Springfield. They've already moved in, and couldn't be happier. "When you know that you have people on your side, rooting for you to succeed, taking such a big step isn't as scary. I don't think I would have been able to do this without all the encouragement I got from Head Start," Heather says.



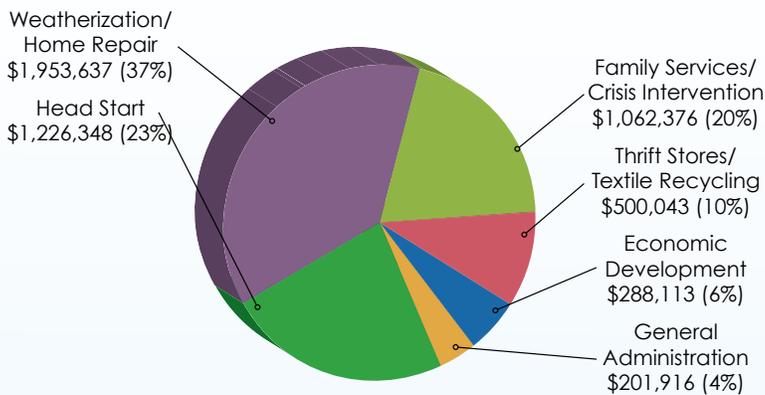
FY2016 Financial Summary

FY2016 Revenue & Other Support



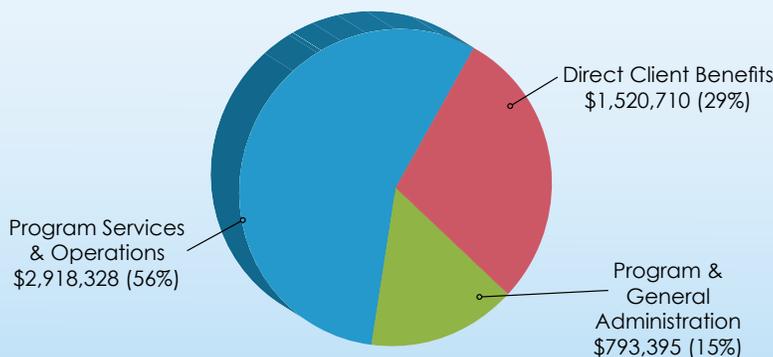
Total Revenue & Support \$5,252,382

FY2016 Uses of Funds



Total Expenses \$5,232,433

FY2016 Allocation of Expenditures



Total Expenditures \$5,232,433

Funding Sources FY2016

SEVCA would like to thank all of our funders and donors for helping us to achieve our mission.

DIRECT FEDERAL

Dept. of Health & Human Services (HHS)

- Head Start Program

Dept. of Agriculture (USDA)

- Housing Preservation Grant (HPG)

FEDERAL VIA STATE

Agency of Human Services (AHS)

Dept. for Children & Families (DCF)

- Crisis Fuel Assistance (HHS / LIHEAP)
- Child & Adult Care Food Program (USDA / CACFP)
- 3Squares Vermont (USDA / SNAP)

Office of Economic Opportunity

- Community Services Block Grant (HHS / CSBG)
- Emergency Food & Shelter Program (EFSP)
- Job Start Grant (USDA / SNAP)
- Weatherization (DOE)

Dept. of Labor

- Workforce Investment Board (WIB)

FEDERAL VIA OTHER SOURCES

Capstone Community Action

- Jobs for Independence (JFI)
- Individual Development Accounts (IDA)

Champlain Valley OEO (CVOEO)

- Vermont Health Connect Navigator
- Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA)

Connecticut Association for Community Action (CAFCA)

- Regional Performance & Innovation Consortium (RPIC)

STATE OF VERMONT

Agency of Human Services (AHS)

Dept. of Vermont Health Access

- Vermont Health Connect Navigator

Dept. for Children & Families (DCF)

- Childcare Subsidies

Office of Economic Opportunity

- Weatherization (HWAP / EHSRP)
- Micro Business Development Program (MBDP)
- Housing Opportunity Program (HOP)
- Financial Fitness (IDA Match)

Agency of Education

- Universal Prekindergarten/Act 166

TOWNS OF:

Andover	Marlboro
Athens	Newfane
Baltimore	Norwich
Brattleboro	Putney
Bridgewater	Rockingham
Brookline	Springfield
Cavendish	Townshend
Chester	Vernon
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Emily Landecker Foundation
Entergy Services/Employee Matching Program
Farnum Insulators
First Baptist Church of Saxton's River
First Congregational Church of Newfane
First Congregational Church, UCC of Springfield
First Congregational Church of Westminster
First Universalist Parish
Granite United Way
Greater Hartford United Church
Green Mountain Power (GMP) (Warmth)



Green Mountain United Way	Mary Mitchell Miller Real Estate	Periwinkle Foundation	Springfield Housing Authority	Foundation	Vermont Low Income Trust for
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Our mission is to enable people to cope with, and reduce the hardships of poverty, create sustainable self-sufficiency, and reduce the causes and move toward the elimination of poverty.

Management Team

- Steve Geller, Executive Director
- Harald Schmidtke, Director of Weatherization and Home Repair
- Denise Mason, Director of Economic Development
- Pat Burke, Director of Family Services
- Lori Canfield, Director of Head Start
- Darline Rhoades, Interim Director of Thrift Stores
- John Nielson, Home Repair Coordinator
- Tom Clews, Finance Director
- Becky Himlin, Director of Planning and Development
- Paul LaFreniere, IT Administrator
- Linda Brooks, Executive Assistant

Acknowledgements

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 Graphic design by Meg Lucas

OFFICE LOCATIONS

Main Office

91 Buck Drive, Westminster, VT 05158
 Tel. 802-722-4575
 Fax 802-722-4509
 Toll Free 800-464-9951

Thrift Stores

Bellows Falls	463-9084
Springfield	885-7074
White River Junction	359-4183

Outreach Offices

Brattleboro (outreach)	254-2795
Brattleboro (housing)	579-1314
Springfield	885-6153
White River Junction	295-5215
Windsor Satellite	674-2900

Head Start

Chester (GMUHS)	875-3904
Main Office, Springfield	885-6669
Springfield classroom	885-6664
White River Junction (Northwoods)	295-1122