



# Annual Report 2023–2024



**INTEGRITY.  
COLLABORATION.  
INNOVATION.**

We are here to help.

# OUR MISSION

Building a stronger community by empowering individuals and families to live healthy and meaningful lives.

## PROGRAMS AND SERVICES

### Business Services

- Community partnerships
- Employee Assistance Program (EAP)
- Management consultation
- Trainings/Webinars

### Children, Youth, and Family Services (CYFS)

- Camp Be A Kid
- Family Emergency Services (FES)
- Family Outreach Program (FOP)
- Individual and group therapy
- Intensive Outpatient Program (IOP)
- Jump on Board for Success (JOBS) program
- Psychiatric Urgent Care for Kids (PUCK)
- Respite services
- School-based services
- Teens4Change peer-led group
- Therapeutic case management

### Community Rehabilitation and Treatment (CRT)

- Community support services
- Group counseling
- Individual counseling
- Programs for those with dual diagnoses
- Residential program
- Supported Employment Program

### Developmental Services

- Case management services
- College Steps program
- Community support services
- Crisis services
- Family support services
- Residential services including group homes and shared living
- Supported Employment Program

### Early Childhood Services (ECS)

- Bennington County Early Head Start
- Bennington County Head Start
- Family outreach
- Parenting and family education

### Emergency Services

- 24-hour emergency service
- Battelle House Crisis Stabilization Center
- Mobile Crisis Service

### Outpatient Mental Health

- Case management services
- Child, adult, family, and couples counseling
- Community education and consultation services
- Equine Assisted Therapy
- Evaluation and psychological testing
- Psychotherapy groups

### Psychiatric Services

- Liaison to intensive hospital care
- Medication management
- Psychiatric consultation
- Psychiatric evaluation

### Substance Use Programs

- Alcohol and drug counseling and education
- Assessment for and facilitation of detox or residential services
- Community outreach
- Consultation to agencies and schools
- Intensive Outpatient Program (IOP)
- Medication Assisted Treatment (MAT)
- Substance-use receiving center

**14%**  
increase in  
crisis calls

**95%**  
of CRT clients reported  
their quality of life  
improved as a result  
of services  
received

**119,978**  
Services  
provided

### Additional content online

Our 2023–2024 Annual Report has its own section on our website, and a YouTube channel with agency highlights. Through these links, you can find videos and expanded information on many of the articles in this report.

Annual Report



YouTube



### Center of Excellence

UCS is a Center of Excellence and member of Vermont Care Partners, a statewide network of 16 nonprofit community-based agencies providing mental health, substance use and intellectual and developmental disability services.

# LEADERSHIP



Greetings,

This year, our team has been unwavering in our commitment to continuously enhancing the ways we serve our community and ensuring all receive exceptional care and support.

We promote **integration** across our programs, encouraging knowledge-sharing to provide better care. **Collaboration** both among our own teams and with community partners fosters dynamic client care where challenges are addressed with collective expertise. This teamwork keeps us agile and enables us to meet complex client needs efficiently and effectively.

**Innovation** remains at the core of everything we do. By investing in new ideas and best practices, we ensure that we deliver comprehensive and high-quality service to both our clients and the community.

We are here to help, and we thank you for your ongoing trust in us.

—Lorna Mattern, Executive Director



UCS Leadership meets with local and state legislators at our Spring Center each winter, to discuss priorities, hear from our staff, and address issues that affect our community.



Dear Friends,

On behalf of the Board of Directors, we extend our heartfelt thanks to the staff and leadership at UCS and their immense dedication in serving our clients and community. Their hard work, collaboration, and commitment to excellence make a profound impact every day. We deeply appreciate their care and professionalism in ensuring that our clients receive the best possible service. They are making a real difference, and for that, we are truly grateful.

With sincere appreciation,

Robert W. Thompson, President of the Board of Directors

## Board of Directors

Robert W. Thompson, *President*  
Charles Letourneau, *Vice President*  
William Baldwin, *Secretary*  
Nathaniel Marcoux, *Treasurer*  
Dave Ballou  
Jeffrey Lynch\*

Joanna Mintzer  
Heidi Moore\*  
Stephanie Mulligan  
Lee Romano

\*Joined UCS Board of Directors this year.

## Senior Leadership Team

Lorna Mattern, *Executive Director*  
Jill Doyle, *Director of Finance*  
Henrietta Edgar, *Director of Developmental Services*  
Amy Fela, *Director of Operations*  
Heidi French, *Director of Community Relations and Development*  
Danielle Gallen, *Director of Human Resources*  
Ryan Lane, *Director of Children, Youth and Family Services*  
Ryan Murphy, *Director of Outpatient Mental Health and Substance Use Services*  
Julie Pagliccia, *Director of Northshire Services*  
Alya Reeve, *Medical Director*  
Rebecca Bishop Ware, *Director of Early Childhood Services*

# INTEGRITY

The quality of being honest and having strong moral principles

## Staff Recognition

UCS celebrated our workforce of over 300 at our annual Staff Appreciation Luncheon recognizing achievements of staff and community partners. More than 200 UCS staff, board members, and community partners gathered for the celebration. UCS acknowledged service milestones from five to 35 years, and honored staff excellence, team excellence, and community partners. *More detailed descriptions of awards and photos of honorees can be found on our website.*

### I CARE Champions

I CARE Champions have been recognized by their peers for putting excellence and care into action in all five of the I CARE core values:

**Ideal Service • Culture of Caring • Accountable • Responsive • Empowered.**

- |                         |                  |
|-------------------------|------------------|
| Stacy Barnett           | Celeste Mancini  |
| Caleb Bishop            | Ellisa Mattison  |
| Mary Gates              | Haley Nelson     |
| Kaitlyn Hamilton        | Desiree Pechtler |
| Lindsey Labonte         | Crickett Polis   |
| Alison Clausnitzer-Lane | Barbara Snow     |
| Nicole Main             | Kayla Stannard   |



### Milestone Anniversaries



Jo-Anne Larsen

**15 YEARS**  
Melody Rogers

**10 YEARS**  
Jareth Andrews  
Ann Barber  
Debra Lucey  
Patrick Wilson

**5 YEARS**  
Celine Blair  
Joselyn Boyd  
Kenneth Cross  
Jeffrey Davis  
April Dunham  
Erica Harwood  
Lyndsey Johnson  
Margaret McCune  
Rachel Muñoz  
William Plath  
Eric Russell  
Nicole Squires

**35 YEARS**  
Jo-Anne Larsen

**25 YEARS**  
Tammy Gosley  
Vicki Potter

**20 YEARS**  
Betsy Rathbun-Gunn  
Tonya Havens  
Nancy Lapinski

### Excellence Award Winners

- |                  |                      |
|------------------|----------------------|
| Bob Andrew       | Erin Shulman         |
| Rebecca Dunham   | Barbara Snow         |
| Ally Gerrity     | Jamie Spear          |
| Amie Niles       | Noreen Stratton      |
| Rachel Olmstead  | Lynn Trefry          |
| Desiree Pechtler | Jennifer Watson      |
| Stacey Ray       | Sydney Lester Wilson |

### Julie Held Award

This award is presented to a staff member who exemplifies the UCS I CARE values and demonstrates a passion for our mission. Our 2024 honoree is **Lynn Trefry**

### Staff Spotlight

“I like that I am helping people, but I am behind the scenes. I’m making a difference in my own way. That makes me feel good.”

—Bob Andrew, Excellence Award Winner and member of the Facilities and Safety Team

Read Bob's Story



### Team Award

This award is presented to a team at UCS that is responsive, respectful and talented, and creates a positive impact on the agency.

#### UCS Facilities and Safety Team:

- Bob Andrew • Celine Blair • Ronald Burgess • Chris Coyne • Kenneth Cross • Paul Clark • Jeff Davis • Phillip Dessert • Tressa Fitzgerald • Melody Mentiply • Tommy Parker • Harry Porter • Tim Proud • Perle Webb



### Gerrit Kouwenhoven Staff Development Award

The Kouwenhoven Award is presented to team members who have demonstrated a commitment to continued learning and improvement. This year's honorees were **Melissa Hunter** and **Victor Martini**.



### Peter D. Scully Award

The Peter D. Scully Memorial Award is presented to employees who embrace the highest qualities of professionalism, dedication, and sincerity in working with colleagues and consumers. This year's Scully Award went to **Debra Lucey** and **Grace Winslow**.

### Heart of the Shires Award

UCS Executive Director **Lorna Mattern** received the Southwestern VT Chamber of Commerce's 2023 Heart of the Shires award for exemplary leadership and service to the community. Chamber Director

Matt Harrington presented the honor at the annual awards luncheon.



## Client Satisfaction

The 2023 Client Satisfaction Survey responses were collected from January–February 2023 and October–December 2023.

- 92%** **Agreed or Strongly Agreed**  
I/We received the services that were right for us.
- 92%** **Agreed or Strongly Agreed**  
I/We received services that we needed.
- 96%** **Agreed or Strongly Agreed**  
Staff treated me/us with respect.
- 92%** **Agreed or Strongly Agreed**  
The services I/We received made a difference.
- 82%** **Agreed or Strongly Agreed**  
My quality of life improved as a result of the services I/we received.
- 89%** **Would recommend UCS to a friend or family member.**
- 92%** **Feel like their personal identity/culture was/is valued.**



UCS was voted Best Community Service Organization by the readers of the **Bennington Banner** and **Manchester Journal**. Since 1958 we have worked to build a stronger, more resilient community. We are honored to again receive this public recognition of our service.



The first stop in any UCS encounter is our friendly reception desk.

**96%**  
of clients were offered an appointment within 5 days

## UNIVERSAL ACCESS: The first stop in creating a care plan

When individuals and families seek help at UCS, their first point of contact is our Universal Access (UA) Team. This small team, led by Jaci Brillon, carefully gathers their intake information and makes sure they are ready to move forward. Intake completed, the new clients participate in a screening and support process with our Finding Access Services and Treatment (FAST) team, which may include a case manager and Same Day Access clinician. The FAST team utilizes Collaborative Network Approach (CNA), a best practice model, to create an environment of psychological and emotional safety and determine the best approach to support each client’s specific needs.

Help is available the same day, and the goal is to get people what they need, when they need it. If a client needs help in addition to or outside of our scope of services, our UA team will refer them to such external resources as:

- Department of Labor
- Emergency Shelter Services
- Financial Supports (3Squares, Vermont Reach Up)
- Food Pantries/Meal sites
- Legal Aid/Victims Advocate
- LGBTQ+ Resources
- Senior Supports
- Veteran’s Resources
- Vocational Rehabilitation
- Women, Infants and Children (WIC)
- and more...



Lisa Rudiakov, longtime resident of Gatling House and party planner extraordinaire, enjoying the deck garden at the spacious group home for Developmental Services clients.

## GATLING HOUSE TURNS 20: Creating a supportive community for residents and staff

UCS Developmental Services Division’s group-home residents get the support they need in their daily activities and in reaching their life goals, whatever those may be. UCS staff are always looking for community opportunities and events that the residents enjoy doing and want to explore. People living in UCS group homes become a family—they eat together, share happy moments together, comfort each other in sad times, and support each other in achieving their goals. UCS’ Gatling House group home celebrated its 20th anniversary this year. Lisa Rudiakov, a longtime resident who also helped plan the celebration, expressed what her home means to her: “It’s been an honor to live here for these 20 years. I hope that we have 20 more years in this house. I have seen the growth in everyone, something wonderful and beautiful. Thank you, Gatling House staff, for making it such a wonderful place.”

**85%**  
of DS clients surveyed reported they like where they live



## Staff Spotlight

**Roxy Iskowitz** is a Direct Support Professional who uses her arts background to teach clients to make incredible things.

“I lead them through their journey, that path of getting from one place to another, and they can't believe somebody else is looking at their work and thinking it's really great.”

Read Roxy's Story



## Staff Spotlight

“My days are filled from the time I get here to the time I leave, but I like the challenge. I have to keep living the best I can, and giving people the best I am.”  
—Wendy Sergeant, Nurse Practitioner

Read Wendy's Story

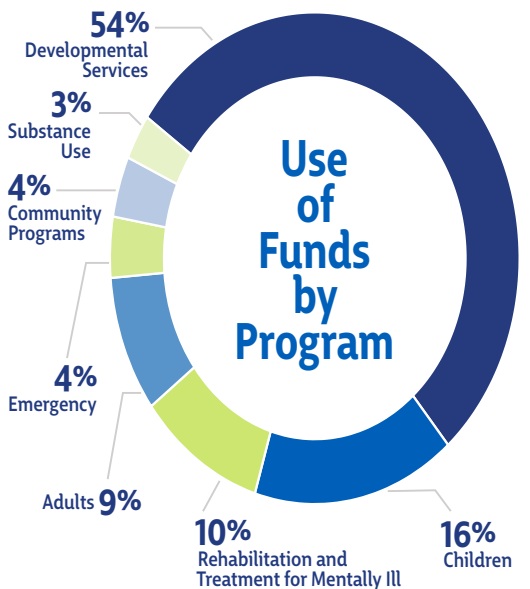
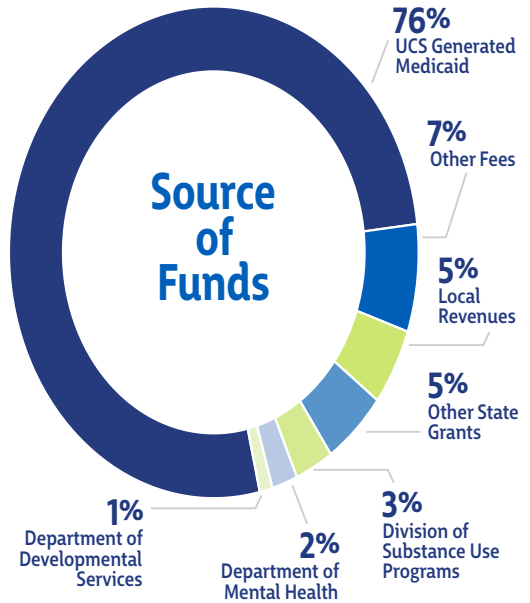


## Budgeted Income for Fiscal 2023–24

Medicaid	\$ 20,730,032
Fees & 3rd Party Payments	\$ 555,725
Vt. Alcohol & Drug Abuse Division	\$ 710,789
Vt. Department of Mental Health	\$ 668,820
Vt. Dept. of Developmental Services	\$ 133,532
Other State Contracts	\$ 1,211,927
Local Revenue	\$ 1,382,594
Miscellaneous	\$ 1,415,346
<b>Total Revenue</b>	<b>\$ 26,808,765</b>

## Budgeted Expenses for Fiscal 2023–24

Salaries	\$ 13,572,998
Fringe Benefits	\$ 3,154,659
Other Personnel Costs	\$ 6,004,253
Operating Expenses	\$ 2,540,009
Travel & Transportation	\$ 396,428
Building Expenses	\$ 1,140,418
<b>Total Expenses</b>	<b>\$ 26,808,765</b>



# COLLABORATION

Working jointly with others; the act of creating something together



Meg Bantle of Full Well Farm and UCS' Worksite Wellness Committee member Sydney Lester Wilson showing off the week's greens during a weekly CSA delivery.

## Worksite Wellness: strength in numbers

This year, UCS received the Vermont Governor's Excellence in Worksite Wellness Gold Level Award. Since their inception 20 years ago, the Excellence Awards have been presented each year to organizations across the state that make employee wellness a priority. "We are extremely grateful to be recognized as a 2023 Vermont Governor's Excellence in Worksite Wellness Award winner," said Executive Director Lorna Mattern. "The health and well-being of our staff and families is a high priority, and we continue to think of new ways to engage them in opportunities to make time for wellness."

4  
Wellness  
Challenges with  
171  
participants

UCS has an organization-wide commitment to creating a supportive and healthy work environment. One of our popular initiatives is a Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) program, providing staff with weekly deliveries of fresh, locally sourced produce, which encourages healthy eating while supporting local agriculture, enhancing employee wellbeing, and making community connections. In addition to our CSA, this past year's notable wellness initiatives included:

- On-site chair massages
- Wellness Fair with biometric screenings
- Soup Off
- Sip & Swirl
- **Let's Move Together Challenge**
- **Boundaries Challenge**
- **Steaking Challenge**
- **Sleep For Your Life Challenge**
- Year of Wellness gift cards
- Tai Chi with Ryan Lane
- Staff Picnic Activities
- Employee Assistance Program with Invest EAP
- Meetings on the Move
- Healthy food options at agency events
- Veggie Van Go
- Flu Shot Clinic
- Smoking Cessation Workshops
- On-site Blood Pressure Checks



Wellness Walks help our staff get out and moving in the fresh air.







## Cleveland and Phyllis Dodge Award

The Cleveland and Phyllis Dodge Award is presented each year to a community member or organization whose support of United Counseling Service has been notable and significant. This year's honoree, Tara Lowary of Bennington's Rhythm Hollow Stables and Kanthaka, has trained numerous UCS team members and is committed to maintaining the rigorous standards of Equine Assisted Psychotherapy, including ensuring client safety and privacy. She does this while remaining gracious and flexible in dealing with challenges and last-

**120**  
Equine  
therapy  
sessions in  
2023-24

minute changes and adapting to different co-facilitators' interpersonal styles.

Tara respects everyone she comes in contact with. She teaches people with different abilities to express themselves, and approaches people with different ways of moving—or who struggle to modulate their behavior, or with differing sexual self-identities—with grace, kindness, interest, and a motivation to help them succeed in interacting with one horse or many. She provides each of her clients with the experiences they need to heal from wounds that may not be visible on the outside.

## On-site pharmacy partnership helps clients stay on track

The UCS main office in Bennington offers an on-site pharmacy thanks to a partnership with Genoa Healthcare. Genoa specializes in addressing the needs of the behavioral health and substance-use disorder communities; people living with complex, chronic conditions; and lowering the barriers that prevent people from getting—and staying—on their treatment. They work closely with UCS client care teams and caregivers.



Pharmacy Technician Larry Herbert and Pharmacist Lauren Carter bring Genoa Healthcare's expertise to UCS' head office.

over  
**90%**  
medication  
adherence  
rate

UCS' Genoa pharmacist, Lauren Carter, was recognized this year as Top Site Manager of all Genoa locations across the country. According to the

company, "The Genoa Outstanding Achievement Awards reflect our mission to provide the best quality pharmacy care possible by recognizing and rewarding team members who go above and beyond for the communities we serve."



In June, UCS, along with other members of Project Alliance, presented the documentary **Just Getting By**, followed by a facilitated discussion led by the film's creator, Bess O'Brien.

## PROJECT ALLIANCE: Area nonprofits working together to address big issues

Project Alliance is a consortium of nonprofit organizations, the town of Bennington, public safety departments, community members, schools, state agencies, and groups serving at-risk populations, all working together to address the root causes of problems in our community. Representatives from each group meet monthly for a facilitated conversation led by UCS Executive Director Lorna Mattern.



Rachel Muñoz, Assistant Director of Emergency Services, leads the team in our community response to an ever-increasing demand for assistance during crisis.

## EMERGENCY SERVICES: Providing safety and care in Bennington County

UCS provides emergency mental health services 24 hours a day, seven days a week, every day of the year. The goal is to provide immediate assistance to community members during what may be some of the worst moments of their lives. Our Emergency Services team helps ensure a person's safety during the crisis and provides information and referrals for ongoing services if needed.

As part of a statewide initiative to respond to the increased need for mental health and substance use intervention across Vermont, UCS offers Enhanced Mobile Crisis Services. Like our other emergency services, the Mobile Crisis Program is available around the clock. It involves a 2-person, in-person response anywhere in Bennington County.

**Enhanced MOBILE CRISIS Services**



You Are Never Alone  
We'll come to you:

- 2-person response in Bennington County
- Receive support
- Lower your stress level
- Feel better
- Available to all Vermonters regardless of ability to pay.



**Available 24/7. Call UCS now: 802-442-5491**

Our Emergency Services staff also step in to offer external support when crises arise in the community. After a recent tragedy, one community member said, “UCS has been remarkable, amazing—an ‘A Team’ of outreach and support.”

In 2023, UCS also expanded our Harm Reduction Program, teaming up with the Aids Partnership of Southern Vermont to provide access to sterile syringes and harm reduction supplies, NAR-CAN, sharps disposal, HIV and Hepatitis C testing and information, and substance use treatment referrals at no cost to community members. Further extending into the community, we now have

two Crisis Specialists embedded with law enforcement, one with the Vermont State Troopers Shaftsbury Station, and one with the Bennington Police Department. The embedded Crisis Specialist responds with troopers and officers to manage and deescalate calls for service, helping create a safer community for all.

13+

community  
post-crisis  
debriefings

270

Assisted through  
law-enforcement  
partnerships

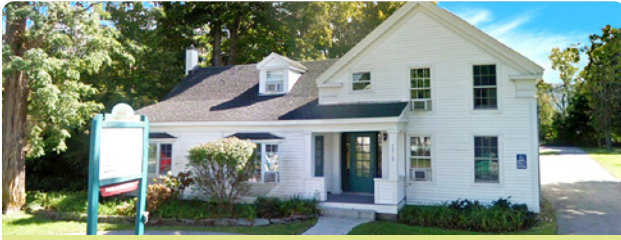
368%

increase in  
mobile  
assessments  
completed

## Medication Assisted Treatment Program expands into the Northshire

Medication Assisted Treatment (MAT) is used alongside other therapeutic tools to help people with substance use disorder reduce or stop substance misuse. This year, UCS expanded its MAT Program to our Manchester location. “We want to meet people where they are in their recovery journey and help them get on the road to where they want their lives to be,” says Ryan Murphy, Director of Outpatient Mental Health and Substance Use Services. Increasing the availability of MAT services is an important step in treating substance use disorder, its symptoms, and negative effects on communities.”

MAT, in combination with other tools such as counseling, offers individuals a greater likelihood of maintaining recovery from substance use disorder.



UCS' Northshire office on Main Street in Manchester Center.

698

Mobile  
assessments  
performed

5,194

Crisis phone  
calls received

## Staff Spotlight

“I consider myself blessed. I really love the job. I like that in my job, you can kind of win the battle and not worry so much about the war. You get clients safe, get them care and treatment. We can make that impact on somebody’s life in the very immediate sense. It’s my dream job that I didn’t even know was my dream.”

—Jamie Spear, Emergency Clinician

[Read Jamie's Story](#)



## New app keeps clients connected and on track

To help meet immediate needs of adult clients, UCS' Substance Use Program launched **CHES Health's Connections** smartphone app, which features a community moderated by certified peer engagement specialists, virtual support meetings, a one-touch button for immediate crisis assistance, daily check-ins, surveys, educational material, and more.



Connections has become a valuable resource for clients and staff alike. Team members can now easily communicate with existing clients through the app, and new clients are onboarded to it right away to remove gaps in support while they await inpatient care. **83% of clients** enrolled in UCS's Substance Use Program are actively using Connections, and they are highly engaged: according to an August 2024 report, UCS clients **engaged in community conversations over 4,600 times**, which included reading, viewing, and liking posts. Of

these engagements, **2,300 were messages or posts initiated by UCS clients themselves.**

# Raising awareness and fostering hope

Our 65th Anniversary culminated in a presentation by Kevin Hines, best-selling author, global speaker and award-winning documentary filmmaker. Kevin presented to a full house at a community-wide event held at Riley Center for the Arts at Burr and Burton Academy in Manchester. The next morning, Kevin joined students at Mount Anthony Union High School to share his story of hope, healing and recovery. Earlier in the month, we presented his documentary film *Suicide: The Ripple Effect*.

“Kevin’s story and voice are so impactful, especially at a time when our community faces increasing rates of suicide, mental health crises, and substance use challenges,” said UCS Executive Director Lorna Mattern, “We hope that by bringing Kevin to our community to share his message, we were able to reach individuals who may be struggling with mental health issues.”

We held our annual Suicide Awareness Vigil at Lake Paran in the fall. This is a beautiful evening where families can share and light a candle in memory of a loved one lost to suicide. All of these events were designed to bring the community together, raise awareness, offer support, and foster hope.

These very special events were made possible by the Gregory S. Hillman Fund at UCS, and the Nathan M. Carreira Endowment of the Stratton Foundation.



We gathered at Lake Paran to remember loved ones and lit floating lanterns in their memory.



## KEVIN HINES

Hope and Resilience: #BeHereTomorrow



**Thursday, October 19 at 7:30pm**

Riley Center for the Arts at Burr and Burton  
143 Seminary Ave, Manchester, VT

**UCSVT.ORG/EVENTS**

*This event is made possible by the Gregory S. Hillman Fund and the Nathan M. Carreira Endowment of The Stratton Community Foundation*

over  
**800**  
people  
attended our 65th  
Anniversary  
events.

“Thank you for all the hard work you have done to make all this possible. I pray that all of us grow more sensitive to the paradox and perplexity of the human condition—the ripple effects of doing good and evil—worldwide!”  
—Quote from attendee

## Teens4Change supports social growth and confidence

UCS' Children, Youth, and Family Services Division offers an after-school program called Teens4Change (T4C), designed by and for teens to build social connections and develop leadership and social-emotional skills. This peer-led group meets weekly, providing a safe environment for young people to discuss personal issues while receiving support from their peers, under the guidance of trusted adult facilitators.

In addition to weekly meetings, T4C members volunteer at community events like Bennington's Mayfest and UCS' Superhero 5K. Last year, the group took trips to New York City, Boston, and the Lake George indoor water park. They also participated in community service projects, including preparing Lake Shaftsbury for the summer season and helping plan and organize the annual Bennington Youth Summit.



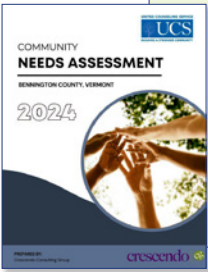
Teens4Change member Ileana enjoying Mayfest with a happy participant.

**12**  
teens in the weekly core group

**20**  
participated in Adventure Camp

**30**  
attended Youth Summit

## Community Needs Assessment



This past spring, UCS partnered with Crescendo Consulting in a wide-ranging, survey-based assessment of community needs. The resulting document provides a deep-dive into the survey responses alongside demographic information, and reflects UCS' commitment to actively engage with residents, stakeholders, and community leaders to foster collaboration and drive positive change.



Read the full Community Needs Assessment report

## UEMR team advances integrity of health records

UCS is part of the Unified Electronic Medical Records (UEMR) Team, comprised of four Designated Agencies. The group's vision is to improve operations, integrate data with health-care partners, use data to enhance care delivery, and build partnerships with key stakeholders. This year the group implemented the Netsmart Identity Access Manager (NIAM), which includes user authentication, access control, and monitoring. The new system will fortify defenses against data breaches and mitigate financial losses resulting from cyber threats.



UEMRVT staff members attended the Connections 2024 conference, hosted by Netsmart, our trusted electronic medical record vendor.

# INNOVATION

Bringing about new ideas or solutions that have a significant positive impact and value



CYFS Intensive Services Manager Rebecca Shuler at HOPE house, hanging out in the sensory room, where children and youth can access a wide variety of therapeutic activities and tools when meeting with UCS program staff.

## HOPE House brings specialized support programs under one roof

The opening of HOPE House (Healthy Options for Psychiatric Emergencies) on Monument Avenue in Bennington this spring created a dedicated space for UCS' intensive services for children and youth up to 18 years old. HOPE House is situated inside a historic building that has been home to various organizations, most recently VNA and Hospice of the Southwestern Region. Now, this location provides a place for Bennington County youth experiencing mental health challenges to find calm and healing.

Two programs are based at HOPE House—Psychiatric Urgent Care for Kids (PUCK) for youth up to age 18 experiencing a mental health crisis, and a mental-health Intensive Outpatient Program (IOP) for elementary-aged children. Kids at HOPE House can access the building's sensory room, which features a rock-climbing wall, light-up ball pit, trapeze swing, and other activities, as a way to learn self-regulation skills. Outside, staff take their young clients on walks on the trails behind HOPE House, as they experience the beauty of nature in Vermont. Staff are also planning a garden plot on the property to give young people opportunities to learn about growing their own produce and the sense of accomplishment that goes with it. One important feature of the house is a dining room where youngsters enjoy family style meals with peers.

Over  
**50,000**  
hours of services  
provided to kids  
in crisis

HOPE House activities are designed to help youth build trust, encouraging positive communication and providing a safe atmosphere for recovering from trauma. The peaceful environment of HOPE House makes participants feel at home—a promising first step toward healing.

### Staff Spotlight

“I got into this field because I wanted to know what gets people with substance use disorder to where they are, and recognizing that it's a disease, not just somebody wanting to use drugs.”

—Tajja LaFountain, Substance Use Case Manager

[Read Tajja's Story](#)



# Youth IOP adapts an evidence-based approach to help kids address trauma

This year, our Children, Youth and Family Services (CYFS) Division launched an Intensive Outpatient Program (IOP) specifically designed for children ages six to 13 experiencing severe mental health concerns. The new program offers an intensive treatment model in a structured group setting that provides a community-based alternative to higher levels of care.



photo credit: storyblocks

This allows kids in the program to attend their school and live at home. An included family component is key to each child's success.

Our first participant in the program, James\*, had difficulties meeting the expectations of the therapeutic summer camp he attended. James' behaviors—fleeing from staff and hiding in the woods—and not following basic instructions from authority figures, amounted to a plea for help. The young boy had assigned himself the role of “protector” of his younger sister during their time at camp. As a result, camp staff encountered obstacles when conversing with his little sister, since even simple conversations provoked a sense of threat in her brother.

Working with James, a pattern of intense behaviors in the school setting became apparent. He continued to perceive a need to protect his sister, who attended the same school. The school reported that James was

running through the halls trying to locate his sister, would become violent towards staff members attempting to help him, and ran off school property several times, which meant the school had to call the police.

UCS' IOP team assisted James in processing his past trauma and helped him relearn being a child, rather than a parent. His treatment was a combination of several evidence-based therapies, including equine assisted psychotherapy (EAP), and play therapy. Through the Youth IOP, staff worked with James's team of providers and family members to create a support system to help him get back on track. One intervention that really made a difference for James was equine-assisted therapy. He thrived while processing his trauma at the barn. James would say to his group members on numerous occasions, “Guys, we are here to get help and learn, not play.” This quote stuck with staff and other participants in the IOP group.

After four months of receiving the help he needed, which included his family members, James graduated with the biggest smile on his face. As the first graduate of the program, he was justifiably excited to celebrate his success. James still talks about his graduation from IOP and carries a picture of his special day to help when he experiences emotional challenges at school. UCS was able to help James stay in school and in his own community while addressing parenting and environmental factors that affected his behavior, ensuring his success.

*\*Name has been changed to protect privacy*

**27**  
kids served  
in the first  
year of the  
Youth IOP

## Bamboo Health platform improves care team responsiveness

High-risk patients and vulnerable populations often require care and communication with multiple providers. UCS began using the Bamboo Health platform in 2023 to provide up-to-the-minute notifications when our clients access the emergency department or hospital. Using admission, discharge, and transfer data received via electronic pings, care team members now have real-time visibility into patient events. Pings connect previously unconnected members of a patient's care team, creating a more collaborative, safety-focused approach to care.

**848**  
clients  
followed

**5,350**  
health  
notifications



Rachel Olmstead, Nurse Manager of the Psychiatric Medical Team

“Previously an ER visit or hospital admission may have been unknown to a person's clinical team,” says Rachel Olmstead, Nurse Manager. “Using this platform has improved the care team's timeliness in connecting with clients post discharge.” The use of Bamboo Health helps the entire care team not only in follow-up actions, but in helping prevent unnecessary and costly readmissions and improving clients' access to care.



# FUNDRAISING EVENTS

## The Barn Sale

The Barn Sale is an annual tag sale that takes place at Riley Rink at the Northshire Civic Center. Volunteers of The Barn Sale Committee, chaired by **Craig Salsgiver**, work year-round to collect, sort and price, and then store and transport the tens of thousands of items donated for the two-day sale. This wonderful group of volunteers spend countless hours to make a difference in our community. All proceeds from the sale support UCS' Northshire Services, including outpatient mental health and counseling, psychiatry, substance use treatment, and children, youth, and family services. **The 2024 Barn Sale raised over \$78,000.**



## Superhero 5K

Over 200 people gathered at the Bennington Community Center to participate in the 6th annual Superhero 5K and Kids' Dash in support of UCS' Teens4Change program. The top three finishers each won a custom slate cutting board from JK Adams, and the top three finishers in each age group won a bottle of maple syrup from Glastenview Maple Farm.



2023 Sponsors



Bennington Banner Manchester Journal



Northeast Delta Dental • GVH Studio • RK Miles  
MSK Engineers • VNA & Hospice of the Southwest Region  
Coggins Auto Group • Hill & Thompson



# ANNUAL FUND

Those we serve are at the heart of everything we do—helping people to grow, develop, recover, and lead their best possible lives. We welcome your unrestricted donations to our General Fund or your contributions to one of our named funds. With your help we can continue to provide much-needed individual and group services and education, and reduce mental health stigma in our community.

## 100%

of UCS board members contribute.

### \$10,000+

The Phillips Family Foundation

### \$5,000-\$9,999

The Alcyon Foundation  
The Nathan M. Carreira Endowment  
of the Stratton Foundation  
Claudia and Peter Kinder Charitable  
Fund of the Vermont Community  
Foundation

### \$2,500-\$4,999

Anonymous  
Patricia Boham  
Brian and Janice Cunningham  
Peter and Lisa Hillman  
*in memory of Gregory S. Hillman*  
Robert and Cora May Howe  
*in memory of Robert Howe*  
Morse Hill Foundation

### \$1,000-\$2,499

Austin and Gillian Chinn  
*in memory of Gerrit Kouwenhoven*  
*in honor of Joanna Mintzer*  
Cheryl L. Ehrsgott, Esq.  
Christopher and Kirsty Elwell  
Community Foundation for a Greater  
Richmond—a gift from James Coss  
Eileen and Francis McCarthy  
*in memory of Claire Reid*  
The Prentice Foundation  
Shira Sternberg  
Stewart's Shops  
Timberland  
*in memory of Claire Reid*  
Langdon Wheeler and Kathy Metcalfe

### \$500-\$999

Anonymous  
Bennington Cooling and Heating  
Diana and Michael Bickford  
Roger and Julia Bolton  
*in memory of Nick Danforth*  
Dean Dixon  
Peter and Nancy Scattergood  
Donavan  
Karyn Ginsberg  
*in honor of Joanna Mintzer*  
Stuart and Colleen Hoskins  
Kelly and Webber Hudson  
Mike and Heidi Lynn  
Lorna and Tom Mattern  
James and Natasha Mindling  
Keith and Pam Nemlich  
*in memory of Gerrit Kouwenhoven*  
Laura R. Walker and Bert Wells

### \$250-\$499

Anonymous  
Carmen Bodge and Paul Parker  
Blue Benn Diner  
Bill and Ruth Botzow  
Carolyn and John Canavan  
*in loving memory of Claire E. Reid*  
Jean and Robert Canavan  
*in memory of Claire Reid*  
Kay and Mike Canavan  
*in memory of Claire Reid*  
John and Lisa Cueman  
Sarah Dahl and Charles Salem  
Hayden Plumbing and Heating  
Richard and Martha Heilemann  
Ira and Anne Kaplan Fund of the  
Vermont Community Foundation  
McEvoy Charitable Fund of the  
Renaissance Charitable Foundation  
Michael and Susan McKenna

Michael Molloy  
Marylou Monroe  
Joseph O'Dea  
Alya Reeve  
Alice and Ross Sandler  
*in honor of Joanna Mintzer*  
Town of Winhall  
Sue and Ted Wright  
Zion Episcopal Church

### \$100-\$249

Anonymous  
Bernard and Cecelia Bandman  
Bennington Car Wash/  
Bennington Express Lube  
Mike and Cathy Brady  
Charles and Kathryn Chamberlain  
Nancy Charlesworth  
James and Laurie Clune  
Gail David and Steven Heydemann  
*in honor of Joanna Mintzer*  
Mark Davis  
*in honor of Joanna Mintzer*  
Wade and Roberta Devlin-Scherer  
Jane and Stephen Duda  
John Ezell  
Janet and Richard Fabricius  
Dr. Raef and Mrs. Bethanne Fahmy  
*in memory of Jared Fahmy*  
Donald R. Ferrell  
*in honor of Joanna Mintzer*  
Josiah Macy Jr. Foundation  
Jonathan and Virginia Freeman  
Audrey Giumarra  
Peter and Mary Goodwin  
*in memory of Charlie Goodwin*  
John and Bonnie Halpin  
*in memory of Sally Sugarman*  
Marilyn and Jim Hand  
Jean Haynes  
*in memory of Julie Held*  
Darlene J. Hazelton  
*in memory of Ray Andrews*  
John Hearst  
James Howe  
*in honor of Joanna Mintzer*  
Ellen D. Kouwenhoven  
Patricia Lapham  
Tom and Marie Litowinsky  
Stephen and Catherine McClure  
Claire Merritt  
*in honor of Joanna Mintzer*  
Curtis Mellow  
David and Gail O'Brien  
*in honor of Victor Martini*  
Suzanne Ordway  
*in memory of Claire Reid*  
Peter & Kari Penkoff  
Robert and Alice Pezzulich  
William Plath  
Ralph and Mary Provenza  
Dale and Craig Raisig  
*in honor of Joanna Mintzer*  
Brett and Maureen Reister  
*in memory of Claire Reid*  
Jill and David Sands  
Richard and Doreen Sylwester  
David and Kathleen A. Truskowski  
*in memory of Claire Reid*  
Wassick Tire Service  
Lynne and Scott Welsh  
Vermont Timber Works

### Up to \$99

Anonymous  
Gloria Alexander *in memory*  
*of Robert Alexander*  
Nancy M. Briggs  
American Online Giving  
Foundation  
Alan Bashevkin and Nancy  
Pearlman  
Mrs. Lois Beardwood  
*in honor of Catherine Hickey, MD*  
Georgeanne R. Bonifanti  
and James R. Church  
*in memory of Claire Reid*  
Marlyn Couture *in memory of*  
*Kimberly Couture Rist*  
Henrietta Edgar  
John and Mary English  
Heidi and Jon French  
Hilary Friend  
*in memory of Claire Reid*  
Give Lively Foundation  
Louis and Marie Guariniello  
Henry and Kathy Hall  
Dorothy C. Halvorsen  
Elaine Harwood *in memory of*  
*Catherine Harwood Sheperd*  
William and Ruthann Hession  
William Innes  
Carol Jefferson  
*in memory of Claire Reid*  
Leatrice Katz  
*in memory of Erika Needle*  
Ivanna Kerod Reed *in honor of*  
*mental health workers*  
Edwin I. Lawrence  
Alan and Terry Lindsey  
Gennaro and Diana Lobosco  
Claire and John Lyons  
Dolores K. Mahlmann  
*in honor of Andrea Malinowski*  
David Malinowski  
John McInerney  
O. Ross McIntyre and Helen Whyte  
Tiffany McMahon  
Edward M. Moloney  
*in memory of Claire Reid*  
Irene and Martin Nadler  
William and Patricia Nealon  
Kathleen M. O'Callaghan  
*in memory of Claire Reid*  
Pledgeling Foundation  
Charles and Linda Putney  
Albert and Virginia Ray  
Melissa and Seth Rice  
*in memory of Claire Reid*  
The Ringe-Eisenman Family  
*in memory of Claire E. Reid*  
Helen Rogers  
Graciela C. Seeger  
*in memory of James Seeger*  
Christopher and Melissa Scudder  
*in memory of Claire Reid*  
William Overfield Smith and  
Kathryn Elizabeth Moloney  
*in memory of Claire Reid*  
Mike and Jillian Veitch  
Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 1332  
Rebecca Bishop Ware  
C.L. White, Inc.  
Margaret, David & Michael Wyatt  
*in memory of Claire Reid*

To learn more about our funds or to  
make a donation, visit [ucsvt.org/give](https://ucsvt.org/give)



# 2023-24 Impact Report



**Bennington County Head Start and Early Head Start** provide essential services for children from birth to age 5. We partner with parents, teachers, and community members to create meaningful, measurable change.



## Educator of the Year

The Vermont Association for the Education of Young Children (VTAEYC), the state's largest membership organization for early childhood educators, recognized UCS' **Tammy Gosley** as the 2023 Vermont Early Childhood Educator of the Year.

Tammy has worked with Bennington County's youngest charges at Head Start/Early Head Start for over 23 years, and knows that social-emotional learning is the foundation of education. "I'm shaping their ideas of what school is," says Tammy. "I want them to have in their minds that school is a place where they are cherished, where they are learners, and where they are teachers as well."

The Vermont Association for the Education of Young Children advances excellence and equity in early childhood education and is the state affiliate of NAEYC, the National Association for the Education of Young Children. A nonprofit organization with over 500 members, VTAEYC offers advocacy, workforce development, professional development, and other resources to its membership and others in the early childhood education field.



Watch  
Tammy's  
Story

## United Children's Services Head Start Program Fiscal 2023-24

### REVENUE

US Department of Health & Human Services	\$ 3,110,998
State/Local Contracts	\$ 2,623,084
Fee for Service	\$ 323,000
Miscellaneous	\$ 226,998
<b>Total Revenue</b>	<b>\$ 6,284,080</b>

### EXPENSES

Salaries	\$ 3,465,857
Fringe	\$ 739,236
Other Personnel Costs	\$ 464,592
Operating Expenses	\$ 921,393
Travel & Transportation	\$ 131,820
Building Expenses	\$ 552,119
Miscellaneous Expenses	\$ 9,063
<b>Total Expenses</b>	<b>\$ 6,284,080</b>

### OUR MISSION:

To prepare children and their families for school through collaborative approaches to high-quality education, health, and social services.

### OUR VISION:

All children and families will be successful lifelong learners.

### OUR VALUES:

Respect • Integrity • Positive Outlook • Responsibility • Equality • Accessibility

## United Children's Services Board of Directors

William Baldwin, *President*  
Nathaniel Marcoux, *Treasurer*  
Kathleen Clark  
Jessica Hartleben  
Katelyn Mason  
Ahmad Yassir

**Main Office (802) 442-3686** 2 Park Street, North Bennington, VT 05257  
**Locations in Bennington • North Bennington • Manchester • Pownal**

## Archie Award

The Harold “Archie” Warner Memorial Award is presented to an individual or organization that has made a significant contribution to our children’s programs.

**Michelle Prouty**, owner of our family child-care home partner program, Forever Friends Playschool, has been a valued Head Start partner provider for over 20 years. Michelle is continually growing and improving quality and services. She collaborates with the Head Start/Early Head Start team, sharing the wealth of her ideas for curriculum and learning experiences. She has great outcomes, including in federal monitoring. Michelle engages closely with parents and kids, is incredibly supportive, and is deeply invested in the economic mobility of the families she serves.



### In the 2023–24 school year,

Bennington County Head Start and Early Head Start programs served:

#### EARLY HEAD START:

76 children enrolled / 70 families served  
48 average monthly EHS enrollment

#### HEAD START:

124 children enrolled /124 families served.  
107 average monthly HS enrollment

**% ELIGIBLE CHILDREN SERVED: 164**  
(children enrolled)/409 (projected  
children ages 0–4 living under the Federal  
Poverty Limit\*) = 59%

85% of HS/EHS children received medical  
exams

51% of HS/EHS children received dental  
exams

*\*Based on population estimates provided by  
economic and policy research for the National  
Center on Program Management and Fiscal  
Operations (PMFO)*

## Family Engagement

In 2023–24 we hosted 17 family programs. Some of the most popular were:

- **Welcome Week** social, health, and safety activities for children and their caregivers
- **Explorers Club**
- **Fishing Derby**
- **Harvest Luncheon**
- **Parent Center Committees**
- **Pinecone bird-feeder making**
- **Pumpkin painting**
- **Solar Eclipse Viewers**
- **Virtual pizza-making**

...And our **Ready Rosie** Parenting Curriculum included:

- **86 caregivers**, with **60 video views** in:
- **73 Teacher Engagement** and **213 Family Outcome opportunities** and
- **167 Learning Outcome opportunities** for caregivers and families

## School Readiness: Percentage of children meeting or exceeding age-level expectations:

**Social and Emotional Development:** 89% of infants and toddlers (*increased 7% from fall*) • 66% of preschoolers (*increased 12% from fall*)

**Language Development:** 69% of infants and toddlers (*increased 7% from fall*) • 74% of preschoolers (*increased 7% from fall*)

**Literacy Development:** 95% of infants and toddlers (*increased 5% from fall*) • 63% of preschoolers (*increased 15% from fall*)

**Mathematics:** 89% of infants and toddlers (*increased 11% from fall*) • 67% of preschoolers (*increased 11% from fall*)

**Approaches to Learning:** 96% of infants and toddlers (*increased 4% from fall*) • 73% of preschoolers (*increased 13% from fall*)

**Physical Development:** 93% of infants and toddlers (*increased 1% from fall*) • 86% of preschoolers (*increased 13% from fall*)

**Scientific Reasoning:** 93%(increased 6% from fall)

*\*This year’s data is lower than historical progress and spring data due to Head Start Full Enrollment Initiative and 23 children moving from the infant and toddler group to the preschooler group mid-year.*

*The auditor’s report on compliance for the major federal award programs for United Children’s Services of Bennington County, Inc. expresses an unqualified opinion on all major federal programs.*

[ucsvt.org/programs/benningtoncountyheadstart](https://ucsvt.org/programs/benningtoncountyheadstart)

Head Start® is a registered trademark of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS)





## Corporate Offices

**United Counseling Service Main Office**  
100 Ledge Hill Drive, Bennington, VT 05201  
**(802) 442-5491**

**United Counseling Service Northshire Office**  
5312 Main Street, Manchester Center, VT 05255  
**(802) 362-3950**

## Program Offices

**Atwood Center for Developmental Services**  
335 Dewey Street, Bennington, VT 05201

**Battelle House Crisis Stabilization Center**  
348 Dewey Street, Bennington, VT 05201

**Burgess Road Children, Youth and Family Services**  
21 Burgess Road, Bennington, VT 05201

**Community Rehabilitation and Treatment**  
316 Dewey Street, Bennington, VT 05201

**HOPE House Children, Youth and Family Services**  
1128 Monument Avenue, Bennington, VT 05201

## Head Start/ Early Head Start

**Head Start/Early Head Start Main Office**  
2 Park Street, North Bennington, VT 05257  
**802-442-3686**

**Head Start/Early Head Start Spring Center**  
655 Gage Street, Bennington, VT 05201

**Early Head Start Infant and Toddler Center**  
100 Ledge Hill Drive, Bennington, VT 05201

**Head Start/Early Head Start**  
5312 Main Street, Manchester Center, VT 05255

**Head Start/Early Head Start**  
97 School House Road, Pownal, VT 05261

## Residential Facilities

**Autumn House Group Home**  
**Bank Street Independent Living Complex**  
**Dewey Street Independent Living**  
**Gatling House Group Home**  
**South Street Group Home**  
**Union Street Group Home**