

## Family Support Program Highlights 2022

The Family Support Program (FSP) celebrated its one-year anniversary in March of 2022. As the program headed into its second year, we thought about the lessons learned from the first year of the program and in particular resident needs going forward. We identified food access, rent assistance, unit upkeep, assistance with paperwork, and reasonable accommodations as areas of focus. These themes have remained consistent through 2022, especially helping residents access the Vermont Emergency Rental Assistance Program (the pandemic relief program for housing costs) as that program began to wind down in September.

One highlight has been seeing the growth of the Armory Lane community in Vergennes. The Armory Lane subdivision was originally conceived of over a decade ago as a holistic community including senior housing, family housing, and a childcare center. The senior housing opened in 2012, followed by the family housing in 2020. The childcare center has yet to come to fruition, but the community spirit between the senior building and the family building has really blossomed with the support of the Family Support Coordinator (FSC). The FSC helped plan a trick-or-treat event for the kids at the family housing to have covid-safe trick-or-treating on the porch at the senior building across the street. The seniors have donated fresh vegetables throughout the summer, which the FSC has delivered across the street to families wanting to participate. This neighborhood represents the best of what nonprofit affordable housing can be, especially when services are provided to support and nurture the people who live there.

Paperwork and bureaucracy has been one of the biggest barriers to residents' ability to access resources. Being able to refer residents to the Family Support Coordinator (FSC) for help with Section 8 paperwork, back rent assistance applications through VERAP, reasonable accommodation paperwork, and other kinds of benefits paperwork was the most impactful support provided through the program. One thing in particular that we learned was the prevalence of food insecurity among residents, even those who were eligible for food shelf or SNAP benefits. It often took the help of the FSC to make sure those residents were actually able to enroll in food shelf deliveries or SNAP.

### Feature: Unit Upkeep Pilot Program

A particular highlight of the year has been embarking on a pilot program to address the challenge of unit upkeep, which can not only jeopardize a resident's tenancy, but also lead to health hazards like fire safety issues, hygiene issues, pests, and general quality of life issues. The program may consist of all or some of the following: services from Family Support Coordinator, one time cleaning of apartment, limited regular housekeeping services, and referrals to community resources. All services are voluntary and provided at no cost to the resident.

We conducted targeted outreach to residents at a property in Middlebury who we identified as potentially being able to benefit from the



*This mother of three who participated in the Upkeep Pilot received help with housekeeping that improved her quality of life and enabled her to focus more on parenting.*

program, with an initial goal of enrolling 2-3 households. Two families responded with interest, and one ultimately ended up participating in the program. So far, the program has had mixed success. **“Working with this family and seeing them make progress toward their goals has been incredibly rewarding,”** says Family Support Coordinator Precious Chamberlin. **“Since they started participating in the program, not only have they cleaned out several rooms and maintained safe egress routes, they’ve also been able to connect with parenting support resources in the community.”**

While the pilot has had a positive impact on this participant, several challenges need to be addressed in order to scale the program. First, enrollment in the pilot was lower than anticipated, and additional outreach and engagement strategies may be necessary to encourage more participation. Second, the Family Support Coordinator provided more direct support than initially envisioned. More case management support and more broadly available services like Occupational Therapy (OT) are needed to assist those with the highest needs. Ideally, the program would refer to services such as housekeeping and OT rather than provide those services directly through the FSC.

## Success Stories



### Fresh Vegetable Donations

Over the summer, residents of Armory Lane Senior Housing at 50 Armory Lane donated fresh vegetables to their neighbors at 45 Armory Lane. Precious facilitated the pickup of the vegetables, coordinated with interested recipients, and distributed the shares on a weekly basis.

“I appreciate the vegetables,” says Thomas, a resident of Vergennes Community Apartments who participated in the program.

### Reasonable Accommodations for Support Animals

Precious worked together with Property Manager Alice Quesnel on a project to help resident dog owners secure reasonable accommodations for their support animals and come into compliance with their leases and municipal ordinances. Alice referred residents to Precious, who helped with reasonable accommodation forms, referrals to animal services, and coordination of other support services as well. Teaming together with a property manager has given residents ability to obtain various resources to help them care for their companions as well as a wider knowledge base of the services that are available in the community.

Chad, a resident at Middlebury South Village, worked with Precious to make sure his dog was properly licensed with the town and complete the paperwork so that his dog was no longer in violation of his lease. Going through the process not only ensures that residents are treated fairly, it also offers the FSC the opportunity to walk through the service animal lease addendum with the resident so they are aware of their rights and obligations, helping everyone (both four-legged neighbors and two) cohabit more harmoniously at the property. In Chad's



case, he was able to get signed up with PetCore through Homeward Bound, which provided a rabies vaccination free of charge to keep his dog safe and healthy. Of his experience with Precious, he remarked, “[She was] **extremely helpful and kept me motivated and you could see she cared.**”

### Program Impact

Having a full-time support coordinator available to resident increased housing stability and promoted health and well-being outcomes in the following ways:

- Assisted dozens of residents with VERAP applications to avoid nonpayment eviction;
- Helped residents with disabilities complete the Reasonable Accommodations process to ensure equal housing access;
- Connected food insecure resident to food shelf deliveries from CVOEO and HOPE;
- Worked one-on-one with individuals to meet self-identified goals including parenting support, budgeting and financial assistance, and unit upkeep;
- Coordinated with housing case managers from service provider partners including John Graham Housing and Services, WomenSafe, and others to provide more intensive ongoing housing support.

In 2022, we made some updates to our program evaluation plan, including tracking the number of contacts, hours spent per participant, and the number of children served by the program.

- 97 households served in 2022, including 60 children
- 81 were at-risk of eviction and received services to support their housing stability; of those, none were evicted
  - 33 were behind on rent and accessed financial assistance that enabled them to be brought current
  - 13 were having issues with neighbors that the FSC helped mediate
  - 35 had another lease infraction, usually failure to recertify or an unauthorized dog
- 17 received various other services, including five who were connected to food access resources.