

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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The Community Foundation for Greater New Haven (the “Foundation”) uses the revenues generated by the many funds that it oversees to improve the quality of life for citizens of New Haven and surrounding communities. The towns of the lower Naugatuck Valley -- Derby, Shelton, Ansonia, Oxford, and Seymour -- are part of the 20-town area served by the Foundation. To assist in its grantmaking to these communities, the Foundation established the Valley Advisory Committee (VAC) in 1993 to advise the Foundation in assessing charitable needs in the Valley and in proactively soliciting Valley applications. To further this agenda, the VAC commenced a project to assess the strengths and needs of the Valley and to recommend comprehensive strategies for grant-making in the Valley. This report is the result of that effort. It seeks to clarify Valley funding priorities, to identify areas of overlap, to highlight best practices in the region, to encourage agency and program collaboration where feasible, and to present an agenda for addressing identified needs in the Valley.

## Methodology

The methodology for completing this work includes the review of all existing relevant studies on the region, individual interviews with 51 stakeholders in the Valley, 13 focus groups to solicit input from special populations, and a survey of nonprofit organizations in the greater Valley area.

## Findings: Regional Overview

- Historically, the Valley has been defined by the rivers, the manufacturing base, and Route 8. These links have continued to provide a strong sense of a region among Valley communities.
- While there is not one clear definition of which municipalities to include in the Valley, the most common definition includes Shelton, Derby, Ansonia, Seymour, Oxford, and Beacon Falls.
- The Valley is in the middle of three economic regions -- New Haven, Bridgeport, and Waterbury. It should be considered its own distinct region and not purely as a subregion of New Haven.
- The Valley economy has emerged from a period of structural transition -- the manufacturing base has rebounded and the region has grown in service producing industries.
- Even though the Valley's economic base as a whole has regained jobs and grown since the recession, Shelton's performance masks the economic underperformance of other Valley towns.
- The downtowns of several municipalities present a very serious challenge to economic and community revitalization.

- A demographic surge of newcomers to the Valley has created both a sense of excitement and tension.
- People inside and outside the Valley perceive the area as being somewhat insular and suffering from an inferiority complex. On the other hand, the Valley also has a reputation as being a community of fighters.
- The lack of a daily newspaper has had a modest, but important, impact on the Valley.

## **Findings: Populations With Special Needs**

### ***A. Working Poor and Poor***

The Valley's working poor can be grouped into a few categories: people earning low wages, the underemployed, vulnerable blue collar workers, and former welfare recipients with low-wage jobs. These residents face a host of barriers in efforts to improve their economic well-being:

#### ***Workforce***

- The Valley's working poor suffer from a mismatch between their skills and the local economy's new skill requirements.
- The working poor have access to a number of workforce development programs in the Valley, chief among them are those operated by TEAM and Valley Regional Adult Education.
- The region's community colleges have little penetration in the Valley.
- Employer demand for workers is incredibly strong providing many opportunities for Valley job seekers.
- The Valley faces two major challenges in terms of creating a workforce development system that meets the needs of its working poor: no resources are focused specifically on the Valley and there are many uncertainties in light of the new Workforce Investment Act.
- At the moment, there is no unified regional workforce strategy in the Valley. A promising new development has been the start-up of the Education and Training Task Force at the Greater Valley Chamber of Commerce.

#### ***Child Care***

- The Valley's working poor families often have to struggle to afford child care.
- Advocates and professionals express concern that working poor parents are often put in an untenable situation by having to choose between a provider based on affordability rather than quality.
- The shortage of licensed infant care is one of the most critical childcare needs in the Valley.
- Another major deficiency in the child care system is off-hour availability.

#### ***Housing***

- Residents and leaders in the Valley perceive affordable housing to be a gap in resources for the working poor.
- A relatively small number of subsidized units, combined with high rental rates, increasing prices for homes, and an overall old housing stock limit the affordable housing opportunities for many Valley residents, poor and working poor.
- The Ansonia Housing Authority (AHA) is the major engine behind Ansonia's relatively high rate of affordable housing.
- The potential threat to relocating the region's one homeless shelter may further reduce housing options for individuals and families in need of emergency housing.

### *Healthcare*

- The Valley has two strong leaders in the healthcare field, Griffin Hospital and the Birmingham Group. Each is noted as a model for healthcare delivery in its field and each serves a large number of the Valley's working poor.
- Gaps that remain in the Valley's healthcare system are largely those experienced by the working poor throughout the U.S.
- The Community Health Connection and the Valley Parish Nurse Program are two low-cost and free medical services in the Valley that meet some of the gaps in healthcare services to the poor and working poor.
- The state's shift to a managed care system and retraction of funds has forced local health providers to find new sources of funding, reshape services, and collaborate with other agencies to fill gaps in healthcare.
- Despite this changing landscape, an analysis by Healthy Valley 2000 found that the Valley performed on par with the state as a whole on many measures of health.
- Two other gaps in the delivery of healthcare services in the Valley are inpatient substance abuse treatment services, and limited services for residents with a dual diagnosis of mental illness and addiction to alcohol or drugs.

### *Transportation*

- Problems related to ready access to transportation was one of the most common themes in all of the interviews.
- The regional transportation task force is an example of a collaborative effort that was able to formulate some innovative solutions to transportation in the Valley.

## ***B. Racial and Ethnic Groups***

The minority population of the Valley, while small, is highly concentrated in Derby and Ansonia. In 1998, approximately 3 percent of the Valley's total population was African-American and 3 percent Latino. A newer group of Bosnians has settled the area, adding to the Valley's other, more established European immigrant communities from Poland, Italy, and Ireland.

- Unlike Italian, Irish, and Polish immigrants, African-American and Latino residents are not as fully integrated into the fabric of the Valley community.
- While there are few overt manifestations of racial tensions in the Valley, many believe that there are underlying issues that are affecting development patterns and the community's civic life.
- The African-American community is relatively well-organized.
- The Latino population has less visibility in the community and less is known about the leadership in the Latino community.
- There are two easily identifiable barriers to a better organized Latino community -- the barrier of language and the internal tensions between different Latino nationalities.

### *C. Youth*

According to population estimates generated by National Decision Systems for Griffin Hospital in 1998, the Valley's youth population between the ages of five and 17 is 16,570 children, or 17.3 percent of the Valley's total population. The proportion of youth between the ages of five and 17 for the state as a whole is slightly lower, estimated to be 16.8 percent of the total.

- An emphasis toward improving the quality of the schools has emerged in the Valley, and the region has begun to reverse a history of under-funding education with a renewed focus on building new schools and developing better curricula.
- Community leaders and officials still note two areas of frustration with the state of the Valley's schools: first is the inability or unwillingness among some schools to work together regionally; and, second, is the weak relationship between schools and organizations in the community.
- There is widespread concern over the lack of teen activities and after school programs serving the Valley's youth.
- There is little coordination among agencies serving children and youth in the Valley.
- Although substance abuse among youth is often high on people's list of community problems, the Valley has generally done better relative to communities outside the Valley. Despite a decline in substance abuse among Valley youth, there is very little in terms of treatment programs.
- Integration into the community is a problem for many teenagers. Some feel a profound sense of isolation from the larger community.
- Low-income teenagers feel that they get little career or workforce guidance from schools or guidance counselors.

### *D. Senior Citizens*

Valley residents ages 60 plus make up 18.1 percent of the total population, while Connecticut residents ages 60 plus make up 18.3 percent of the statewide total. Much like the rest of the country, this proportion is expected to grow.

- There is a good infrastructure of senior centers with sufficient resources to meet demand. The major limitation in senior center services is lack of coordination.
- There is a significant population of senior "shut-ins" who are not being reached through current programs.
- There is significant shortage of senior housing in the Valley.
- Transportation for seniors is relatively strong in the Valley.

## **Findings: Community Needs**

### **A. Civic Infrastructure**

Civic infrastructure is the backbone or “operating system” that gives shape and substance to a community. Civic infrastructure manifests itself in the decisions that individuals, organizations, businesses, and community institutions make over time. When civic infrastructure is strong, unified, and broadly representative, it creates a vision for a community, it provides a voice to people who live in the community, and it puts in place the leadership and resources to make the vision a reality.

- The Valley has a number of extremely strong, large nonprofit health and human service organizations with considerable capacity that can serve as models for the rest of the New Haven region, as well as the state. The Valley also has a number of regional civic organizations focused on improving the quality of life for Valley residents.
- Smaller nonprofit organizations in the Valley have very limited capacity -- particularly in the area of fundraising and proposal development.
- The overall collaborative environment amongst nonprofit institutions and municipalities has dramatically improved in recent years.
- Lack of staffing at the Economic Alliance and the Valley Council limit their ability to effectively implement innovative initiatives.
- While there has been progress around organizational collaboration, overlapping activities, inefficiencies, and tensions still exist, most notably in the areas of youth services, elderly services, and substance abuse services.
- Even with the increased cooperation amongst organizations in the Valley, the system of referrals and linkages across organizations is not as effective as it should be.
- With the exception of Healthy Valley, collaboration across disciplines -- human service providers, environmentalists, economic development organizations, downtown development organizations, and educational and workforce development organizations -- remains weak.
- Leaders within the region’s nonprofits have offered the most visible sign of leadership in the Valley. Corporate leaders and executives have not contributed as much to the Valley’s civic infrastructure as have their counterparts in the public and nonprofit sectors.
- The Valley has a strong history of volunteerism, yet the current cadre of leaders in the Valley is spread very thin.

- The larger minority community in the Valley, older as well as newer immigrant and ethnic groups, is not as central a feature in the Valley's civic infrastructure as it should be. The Latino community is noticeably absent from the group of people who form the leadership base in the Valley.
- The newer residents who have recently moved to the Valley have not become actively engaged in the region's civic organizations.
- The Valley is being split by the many different federal, state, and regional jurisdictions, constraining effective regional actions and access to resources.
- Many local officials do not have a deep understanding of the economic and social issues of the Valley.
- The Council of Elected Officials is a relatively weak organization and regional planning in the region is limited.

## ***B. Community Development***

Community development within the Valley region involves efforts to strengthen the overall quality of life in the community by promoting: a healthy economic and commercial base; quality housing available for all residents; a healthy natural environment; and a cultural environment that enriches the lives of people living in the region. Community development activities affect the lives of all residents of the Valley as well as the vitality of the businesses that operate there.

### ***The Environment***

- Industrial waste and brownfields are the most identifiable and pressing environmental problems confronting the Valley.
- The Brownfields Pilot project is an innovative and effective regional effort that offers considerable promise in addressing environmental issues in the Valley.
- Sprawl and the loss of open space is becoming a major concern, and with no regional land use planning there is a threat to the long-term quality of life in the region.
- A number of small environmental organizations in the region are focusing on preserving farm land, open space, and the quality of the rivers. However, they have limited capacity and have not been very involved in regional collaborative organizations.
- The Valley's rivers are a critical community asset.

### ***The Region's Downtowns***

- The downtowns of several municipalities present a very serious challenge to economic and community revitalization.
- The small, downtown-oriented business organizations have limited capacity.

### *Economic Development in the Region*

- The region's economic development efforts have focused very extensively on attracting new companies to the region and have spent limited time on retention and small business development.
- With the exception of the Shelton Economic Development Corporation, the small, municipally-based economic development groups have relatively limited capacity.
- The Valley Alliance for Economic Growth provides a strong foundation for expanding collaborative economic development efforts in the region.
- The lack of a Valley location for the Small Business Development Centers and other regional business resources limits their use by entrepreneurs and small businesses in the Valley.
- Designation of the Naugatuck Valley as an Economic Development District of the EDA could provide additional federal resources for economic development investments in the Valley.

### *The Arts and Cultural Environment*

- The Valley's proximity to New Haven and Waterbury, where there is a critical mass of arts and culture, has acted as a disincentive to developing a more viable arts and cultural infrastructure in the Valley.
- Arts programming in the schools is somewhat limited due to the lack of scale in each individual district.
- The Sterling Opera House presents opportunities for the Valley, if proper planning and development are undertaken.
- The new arts and culture brochure created by Healthy Valley 2000, along with the cultural planning study currently being undertaken, are important steps in developing a strategy for the Valley's arts and cultural environment.

## **Findings: Foundation Grantmaking**

Everyone in the Valley viewed the Foundation as a very valued asset and resource and acknowledged the Foundation's outreach efforts in the Valley. However, there has been frustration by some in the Valley toward the Foundation. While the overall tensions have been eased substantially, some individuals in the Valley remain concerned.

- Staff turnover at the Foundation has affected the communication between the Foundation and the Valley.
- The VAC could be more effective in directing promising organizations and projects to the Foundation.
- While there is a perception that the Valley feels a sense of "entitlement," there is, in fact, agreement among many Valley leaders that the Foundation should not be funding poor proposals just because they are located in the Valley.
- There is some belief in the Valley that "regional" grants have limited value to the Valley.

- Limited applications from the Valley is a serious concern.
- The Neighborhood Initiative Program in the Valley does not have a clearly defined mission.
- The survey of grantees found that local nonprofits had a number of capacity building needs.
- The Foundation has developed a new process designed to overcome some of these past problems.
- Applicants to the Foundation reported positive experiences with the grant application process.

## **Recommendations for Improving Foundation Grantmaking**

The Foundation is recognized as a significant resource for the Valley. Using its funds strategically, the Foundation can play an important role in helping Valley residents and organizations provide for the community's needs. By focusing on the Valley as a region, the Foundation can play a supportive role in fostering collaborations among organizations and encouraging more efficient and coordinated service delivery. Because of the historical role of the Foundation in the Valley and the past controversial perceptions, over its grantmaking, the Foundation's process going forward is as important as the substance of its efforts. The following recommendations focus on suggestions for the Foundation as it seeks to further improve its grantmaking activities in the Valley:

- Provide longer-term (i.e., three-year grants), with annual performance reviews, to exemplary Valley programs and collaborations that help to advance regional services.
- Provide seed funding for new ideas, feasibility, and organizing activities.
- Develop a clearer mission and funding priorities for the Small Grants Program in the Valley.
- Further streamline the application process for the Small Grants Program.
- Undertake a more ambitious marketing and outreach effort to familiarize Valley residents and organizations with the Small Grants Program.
- Continue and deepen current efforts to make the grant process clearer and simpler.
- Take steps to further strengthen relationships between Foundation staff and Valley organizations.
- Place increased emphasis on leveraging of foundation support with other foundation, state and federal support.
- Ensure that regional organizations or programs serve the Valley effectively.
- Develop a new initiative that seeks to build capacity among grantees and other Valley organizations.
- Broaden the representation of the VAC and deepen the involvement of its membership.

- In keeping with its intended purpose, the VAC could play a more active role as a “convener” of stakeholders in the Valley, an information intermediary, and a “catalyst” for new initiatives.

## **Recommendations for Regional Action -- Responding to Community Needs and Opportunities**

### **Strategy: Create a More Streamlined and Productive Civic Infrastructure in the Valley**

- ✦ *Hold a full-day summit in the Valley focused on creating a more efficient and streamlined civic infrastructure.*
- ✦ *Plan a community meeting to review this report with the Valley residents, and another community meeting one year from the release of the report.*

### **Strategy: Substantially Broaden the Leadership Base within the Valley’s Existing Civic Infrastructure**

- ✦ *Recruit five to ten business and corporate CEOs to serve in leadership positions within the Valley’s civic infrastructure.*
- ✦ *Create a mentoring program that pairs a current leader in the Valley’s civic infrastructure with someone who shows leadership potential.*

### **Strategy: Make Racial and Ethnic Diversity of the Valley a Regional Strength**

- ✦ *Organize and conduct a Study Circles program in the Valley that focuses on race and ethnicity.*
- ✦ *Identify and recruit Latino leaders to become an integral part of the Valley’s civic infrastructure.*
- ✦ *Create a Translator Pool within the Valley Council to serve the needs of non-English speaking residents.*

### **Strategy: Create a Strategic Approach to Workforce Development that Benefits the Poor and Working Poor**

- ✦ *Develop a Valley workforce development plan.*
- ✦ *Launch a demand-driven training program.*
- ✦ *Design career ladders for the underemployed.*

### **Strategy: Create a More Comprehensive Approach to After-School Activities and Community Services for the Valley’s Youth**

- ✦ *Establish a Valley-wide youth collaborative.*
- ✦ *Turn public schools into community learning centers.*

- ✦ *Establish business-education partnerships throughout the Valley, as a means of strengthening and enriching the educational experience of young people in the K-12 school systems.*

**Strategy: Create Efficient Systems of Service Delivery among the Valley's Senior Centers and Extend Services to Isolated Shut-ins**

- ✦ *Host a special senior citizen planning session in the Valley.*

**Strategy: Increase Intermunicipal Cooperation around a Range of Development Issues that Affect the Communities of the Lower Naugatuck Valley**

- ✦ *The Valley Regional Planning Agency, working with area residents and business people, should develop a plan to protect and sustain the region's natural environment.*
- ✦ *Fund a pilot regional project initiative.*

**Strategy: Retain and Create New Jobs in the Valley by Assisting Existing Valley Companies and Residents with Entrepreneurial Interests**

- ✦ *Initiate a Business Calling Program to assist in the retention and expansion of existing companies.*
- ✦ *Advocate for the establishment of a one-stop business assistance center at the Valley Chamber of Commerce.*

**Strategy: Create New Affordable Housing Opportunities**

- ✦ *Support the formation of a regional nonprofit housing developer in the Valley.*