



Meeting Minutes

Meeting Date: February 9, 2016

Present: Kaight Altoff (South Hero Congregational Church), Judy Ayers (Champlain Islands Methodist Food Shelf), Tina Bushey (The Abbey Group), Stacey Carpenter (Vermont Department of Health – St. Albans Office), Forrest Gardner (Champlain Valley Office of Economic Opportunity), Walt Gaskill (Franklin – Grand Isle Community Action), John Gorton (Sheldon Food Shelf), Nina Hansen (The Abbey Group), Joan Hubbard (Hannaford), Mark McMillen (VT Department for Children and Families), Michelle Monroe (*St. Albans Messenger*), Melanie Riddle (Fairfield Community Center), Terry Seekamp (Grand Isle Supervisory Union), Joan White (Champlain Valley Office of Economic Opportunity)

Chair: Robert Ostermeyer (Franklin - Grand Isle Community Action)

Hunger Free Vermont Staff: Katy Davis and Jenna Banning

<u>Welcome & Introductions</u>	<u>Action Steps & Handouts:</u>
<p><i>Introductions and updates from Council members on nutrition or food security initiatives that they and their organizations have been working on since the last meeting.</i></p> <p>Announcements from Members:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Jenna Banning (Hunger Free Vermont)</i> - Since we last met, we launched our 8th Hunger Council statewide. The Hunger Council of the Northeast Kingdom met in December with over 40 people in the Barton Library’s basement - it was a great meeting, and we’re looking forward to working with that group! We will be launching 2 more Hunger Councils by the end of March in Rutland and Bennington Counties - that will end our Hunger Council expansion, and bring statewide Hunger Council coverage with 10 Councils statewide. • <i>Kate Ash (Office of Senator Leahy)</i> – Jenna shared two updates from Kate Ash, who was unable to attend the meeting: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Update on Child Nutrition Reauthorization: Last year, Senator Leahy introduced the bipartisan Farm to School Act of 2015 to expand eligibility and funding for the federal USDA Farm to School grant program, ahead of the anticipated Child Nutrition Reauthorization (CNR). On January 20, 2016 the Leahy-Cochran Farm to School Act of 2015 was unanimously approved by the Senate Agriculture Committee as part of the Improving Child Nutrition Integrity and Access Act of 2016. This is a great victory for the farm to school movement, and includes expansion of programming to afterschool and pre-school sites, and doubles mandatory federal funding to \$10M annually to support programs like those in Vermont. This bipartisan CNR also includes recommendations submitted by the Vermont Child Nutrition Reauthorization Coalition, including the maintenance of strong nutrition standards, as well as expanded eligibility for the Child Care and Adult Food Program (CACFP) and the Supplemental Assistance Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC). The bill may not now be considered by the full Senate, as well as the House before final passage and implementation of these included provisions. Please visit here to learn about the most recent updates to this process. 	

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Senator Leahy Announces Expansion of Charitable Deductions of Food Donations: Back in December, Senator Leahy praised the inclusion of a provision aimed at fighting hunger by incentivizing donations of surplus food to local food shelves in the fiscal year 2016 spending package. In two previous congresses, Senator Leahy had been the leading advocate for the bipartisan Good Samaritan Hunger Relief Tax Incentive Extension Act, which expands and makes permanent incentives for farmers and businesses to donate excess food to nonprofit organizations like local food banks and pantries. Please visit here and feel free to contact Kate Ash with any questions. ● <i>Robert Ostermeyer (Franklin-Grand Isle Community Action)</i> - Robert introduced Joanie Hubbard, the Manager of the Hannaford’s store in St. Albans. Customers at Hannaford stores can donate money towards “Helping Hands” - boxes of food that are donated to local food shelves. Customers at “Joanie’s” Hannaford store raised money for 4,112 boxes - the most in the region, which Robert and Walt Gaskill credit for a huge proportion of their food shelf’s available foods. Helping Hands boxes equal 30% of what the food shelf distributes throughout the year, and has allowed the shelf to expand its offerings to clients from 1 visit per week to 3 visits in a week. Robert thanked Joanie and Hannaford for focusing on hunger relief. Joanie credited the entire community for its support of this program, with particular thanks to Emerson Lynn and the <i>St. Albans Messenger</i> for their support and publicizing of the program. Since the store won the contest, the store also received \$3500 in gift cards that food shelves can use towards purchasing foods or meals from the store. Hannaford also got a company grant that was used to help the Vermont Foodbank purchase a refrigeration unit at their Barre distribution warehouse. 	
<p><u>Food Diversion Action Group</u> <i>The Council discussed forming an action group to work specifically on the food diversion pilot project.</i></p> <p><i>Robert Ostermeyer - Robert introduced the idea of a subcommittee to focus in-depth on the issue of food rescue and the effects of Act 148. This topic has been discussed over the past few meetings, and it could be effective to create a small group to look at what is already established, what opportunities exist, and what could be done in this region.</i></p> <p><i>Katy Davis – Katy reminded Council members of this discussion at the last Council meeting, and feels that this smaller group will be a great tool to focus on an issue that is much too big for the larger Hunger Council to work on as a whole - the subcommittee can figure out the system and potential solutions, and then bring those ideas to the larger Council for consideration. The subcommittee would bring together representatives from a number of different sectors, including institutional food service, gleaning, the solid waste district, food producers, and grocery stores. The group would come together around early April before the next larger Hunger Council meeting in May, and would work on establishing goals and an action plan. Pat Sagui from the Food Cycle Coalition Task Force, who presented to the Hunger Council in the September 2015</i></p>	



<p><i>meeting, is interested in supporting a subcommittee's work up through that point. Katy would like to see the subcommittee go even further, and start implementing the plan in the community.</i></p> <p><i>Jenna shared that there is a lot of interest in this plan statewide, as well as a little envy that the Franklin and Grand Isle region will get to be a pilot in this project.</i></p> <p><i>Council members suggested people who should be part of the subcommittee, and some volunteered to take part. With this Hunger Council still relatively young (launched in May 2015), Council members felt that this could be a great way to bring in individuals and sectors that have not yet been engaged with the Council.</i></p> <p><i>The Council also discussed the idea of forming a different work group to focus on summer meal programs. Katy explained that while it is almost too late to focus on summer meals for the 2016 season, this could be a good time to start planning for 2017. Katy has data from the 2015 summer sites, and Mark McMillen expressed interest in working on this idea.</i></p>	<p><u>Action:</u> Katy will begin pulling together a Food Diversion Subcommittee.</p> <p><u>Action:</u> Jenna will poll entire Hunger Council on interest in subcommittee formation and work.</p>
<p><u>Supporting School Nutrition Programs</u></p> <p><i>School nutrition programs, including breakfast, lunch, afterschool, and summer meals, are an important resource for addressing food insecurity for children. After a general overview of how these programs work, the Council heard from local perspectives and identified areas for future investigation and action.</i></p> <p><i>Robert introduced Katy, who shared an overview of how federal meal programs work structurally and what options are available. The Council then heard from Terry Seekamp from Grand Isle Supervisory Union and Nina Hansen and Tina Bushey from the Abbey Group, who shared what exists currently in the region.</i></p> <p><i>Katy Davis (Hunger Free Vermont) - School meals are an important part of children's days for many different reasons, and for many children, school meals are the most consistent and reliable source of nutrition. Katy described the spectrum of difficult decision surrounding food and budgets that many families face, and explained the impact of food insecurity on children's development and future success.</i></p> <p><i>Currently in Vermont, 98.5% of schools serve meals to approximately 89,000 students. 43% of Vermont students receive free meals, and with more students likely eligible, this shows the financial need that many families are experiencing. School meals have been linked with improving academic achievement, and by providing consistent nutritious meals at schools, lower-income Vermont students are able to avoid falling behind their peers.</i></p> <p><i>Katy described some of the nutritional requirements that school meals must meet. These requirements have been strengthened since 2010's Child Nutrition Reauthorization, and include requiring students to take more fruits and vegetables and reducing the amount of sodium in meals.</i></p> <p><i>There are several federal programs that help provide meals to children: the National School Lunch Program, the National School Breakfast Program, Afterschool Snacks, and At-Risk Afterschool Meals. Schools can also receive commodity products from the USDA.</i></p>	<p><u>Handout:</u> "Feeding School Aged Children in Franklin and Grand Isle Counties" power point (attached)</p>



In many school meal programs, students are categorized by household income, and the government subsidizes the cost of providing meals at different rate for each category. In Vermont, the “reduced-price” category has been eliminated, and all students who would pay that rate are instead eligible for free meals.

Jenna shared that the advocacy power of the Hunger Councils when this change was being considered was crucial in convincing the Legislature, and notified Council members that Hunger Free Vermont will be reaching out again in this legislative season with another opportunity to strengthen school meal programs.

Katy - Students may also be eligible for free school meals if they are in certain categories (i.e. homeless, in a household that receives 3SquaresVT (SNAP), or a foster child). Katy then described the concept of Universal School Meals, in which every child is fed at no charge. Students at schools with Universal School Meals are not stigmatized for “being poor” if they eat a school lunch, and participation in the school meals programs typically increases, leading to lower per-plate costs for food service. The Council discussed the current state of paperwork and administration for school meal programs, and how this could change information collection for schools and communities.

Katy described the two ways to provide Universal School Meals - Provision Two and Community Eligibility Provision (CEP). Both have different requirements, and due to the rural nature of Vermont, only a few schools in Burlington have implemented Provision Two; most schools are better suited for CEP. With CEP, at least 40% of a school’s students must be categorically eligible for free school meals, although Katy explained that for this to be financially sustainable for a school, that percentage should be higher. The Council discussed some of the eligibility requirements for schools to serve Universal School Meals - more information on each of the two provisions is available in the handouts. (See attached)

Turning to afterschool and summer meal programs, if at least 50% of a school’s student body is eligible for free and reduced price meals, and/or if the school is participating in Universal School Meals, organizations in the service area of that school are then eligible to serve afterschool meals and snacks and have open summer meal sites that can provide free food to all children.

Currently, 52 schools in Vermont are serving Universal School Meals, including 7 in Franklin and Grand Isle counties. All of the schools in the two counties serve both breakfast and lunch, and there is 1 afterschool meal program. The Council reviewed a list showing the percent of free and reduced price students at schools in Franklin and Grand Isle counties, and discussed the opportunities as well as challenges of multi-school collaborations to provide afterschool and summer meal programs.

Katy described some of the challenges facing school meal programs, which have put many school meal programs in the state running deficits. She then shared tools to help increase participation in school meal programs (which can help make them more financially viable), and tools for community members to support school meal programs in the community.

Nina Hansen (The Abbey Group) - Nina is the Food Service Director with the Abbey Group, which operates a number of food service programs for schools across the region. Nina believes that Universal School Meals ‘brings kids and communities together...With Universal School Meals, every child can feel good about eating well in the school meal program.’

Nina shared what has been happening at the St. Albans City School, which is in its first year of USM and participates in every meal program that Katy mentioned.

Nina then described some of the summer meal programs operating in the region, including Highgate Library, the St. Albans City Pool, and the City Hall. The City Pool serves between 50-75 meals daily over the summer, and has told the Abbey Group that children are waiting for the pool to open in the morning so that they will have access to food, showing the great need for food over the summer. Tina, who is the Associate Director with The Abbey Group, described how the number of meals being served at open meal sites can vary widely, and emphasized her commitment to making sure that children looking for a meal will get one.

The Council discussed some of potential next steps for expanding summer meals, including the need to spread out the sites geographically so children across the region can access them.

Terry Seekamp - Terry is the Health Education Coordinator with the Grand Isle Supervisory Union. Alburgh used to have a summer meal site, which was funded by a 21st Century Grant. However, since the site lost its funding, there have been no out-of-school programs available. The community is working on getting programming back, but transportation limitations and costs in order to get children to the site is a big challenge, since the school is not easily accessible for many in the community.

Katy shared that the President's proposed budget includes an increase of EBT money over the summer in places where summer meal sites are not possible. It's unclear whether this will make it through the Congressional budget, but there's a lot of enthusiasm behind this idea.

Robert introduced Kaight Altoff from South Hero Congregational Church, which was the benefactor of the Empty Bowls event recently.

Kaight Altoff - Kaight runs the Food for Thought Program, which is part of the South Hero Congregational Church's operations. Kaight was inspired to start the program nine years ago, in response to an alert sent out by Hunger Free Vermont on the high number of children at risk of hunger over the summer. Kaight's best friend partnered with her, and required that books had to be involved, which led to the idea of giving out a box of food and a book every month. In the first year, they predicted 10 kids would sign up; they got 47 kids. The program served 147 kids last year, which was a record high.

The program serves all of the islands. Families can pick up their boxes at the Congregational Church in South Hero or at the Fire Station in Alburgh, although Kaight does deliver some boxes for families without cars or who live in remote areas. There is no means-testing or eligibility requirement. Families sign up a few days in advance of the box drop-off so Kaight knows how much food to buy, and then pick up their boxes on the set date. The program has been doing its distribution on Sunday evenings, but is switching to Thursday evenings this summer to see if that works better for families' schedules.

Kaight operates the program on a budget of \$15,000 for 10 weeks over the summer. There is a lot of volunteer support, including volunteers who help families fill out paperwork for assistance. The program worked with the Vermont Food Bank in the past, but because the program is smaller, Kaight has found it easier to instead purchase food from Hannaford and local stores. Hunger Free Vermont helped support the program a few years ago. Ben & Jerry's in St. Albans has been very generous, as has the Grand Isle County Health Council.



<p>Kaight also works with Judy, who runs the food shelf at the Methodist Church, to coordinate food distribution. Hackett’s Orchards allows Food for Thought to store food in their facilities over the summer.</p> <p>Kaight would like to be able to reach more families, and would like help with outreach. Food for Thought sends a letter to all of the principals in the region in order to get information on the program included in the summer newsletters, and also includes information in <i>The Islander</i> and Front Porch Forum. Kaight is also working to help provide food over school breaks.</p> <p><i>Nina Hansen suggested using the school alert system, and Terry Seekamp volunteered to advocate for this, stating that the new Grand Isle Superintendent is fabulous and would be supportive. Terry agreed that reaching principals can be hard since they are so busy, but encouraged Kaight to repeatedly contact them. Terry also supported the need to provide food over every school break.</i></p> <p><i>The Council agreed to help Kaight identify and connect with resources in the community.</i></p>	
<p>Wrap Up & Final Announcements:</p> <p>Mark McMillen - There is a Promise Communities meeting tomorrow (Feb. 10th) at the Church of the Rock from 1:00 - 3:00, which will be focusing on school-age demographics. Mark agreed to keep nutrition at the forefront of the Promise Communities’ work.</p> <p>Forrest Gardner - Forrest helps run “The Growing Money Program,” which offers free financial capability services to low and moderate income individuals. Forest is a credit and financial coach, and works out of the CAP Agency office (CVOEO). Forrest offers one-on-one meetings and regularly scheduled classes, and has done workshops with community organizations in the area. Forrest is interested in reaching some of the area’s outlying communities - connect him with suggestions of how to reach or if you’d like him to come to you.</p>	<p><u>Handout:</u> “The Growing Money Program” flyer (attached)</p> <p><u>Action:</u> Contact Forrest at fgardner@cvoeo.org if interested in hosting a workshop.</p>
<p>Meeting Adjourned</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Next Meeting: May 11, 2016, 9:30-11:30am at the State Office Building in St. Albans</p>	