



## Meeting Minutes

**Meeting Date:** December 11<sup>th</sup>, 2015

**Present:** Debra Bach (Vermont Department of Health, St. Johnsbury Office), Nelson Baker (Green Mountain United Way), Jennifer Bernier (Fresh Start Community Farm), Bernadette Bessette (UVM Extension), Jim Biernat (Vermont Department of Health, Newport Office), Dixie Burns (Vermont 2-1-1), Jennifer Cleveland (*Caledonian Record*), Tracy Collier (Department for Children and Families, Economic Services Division), Ryan Collins (Green Mountain Farm to School), Heidi Cooperstein (Northeast Kingdom Community Action), Steve Crevoshay (Community Member), Tim Daley (Cooking the Fish, LLC), Ben Doyle (USDA Rural Development), Jane Edwards (Upper Kingdom Food Access), Toni Eubanks (Barton Public Library), Ginny Flanders (Northeast Vermont Regional Hospital), Katie Haley (Vermont Army National Guard), Justin and Mary Ellen Hannington (Island Pond Community Garden Project), Tammy Lamoureaux (Northeastern Kingdom Community Action), Alison Low (Northeastern Vermont Development Association), Michelle Maitri-Mudita (Children's Integrated Services), Lallie Mambourg (Northeast Kingdom Council on Aging), Bill McMasters (retired UVM Extension), Becca Mitchell (Green Mountain Farm to School), Tom Morse (Faith in Action), Brittany Nevins (Let's Grow Kids), Alaria O'Brien (Vermont Veterans Outreach Program), Rev. Alan Parker (United Church of Craftsbury), Jeff Pierpont (Walden Select Board, Passumpsic Savings Bank), Dawn Powers (Building Bright Futures, Children's Integrated Services), Madeleine Roy (Green Mountain United Way), Laural Ruggles (Northeastern Vermont Regional Hospital), Kinsley Sicard (Vermont Department of Labor), LauraLee Sweeney (Northeast Kingdom Community Action), Amy Skelton (Pete's Greens), Penny Thomas (St. Mark's Episcopal Church), Sarah Waring (Center for an Agricultural Economy)

**Chair:** Colleen Moore de Ortiz (Vermont Department of Health)

**Hunger Free Vermont staff:** Faye Conte, Ginger Farineau, and Jenna Banning

### Welcome & Brief Introductions

*Colleen Moore de Ortiz welcomed everyone to the meeting, and asked for quick introductions of attendees, their organizations, and why they came.*

*Colleen Moore de Ortiz* - Colleen is a R.N. at Northeastern Vermont Regional Hospital, and School Liaison and Chronic Disease Prevention Specialist for the Vermont Department of Health, Newport Office.

*Steve Crevoshay* - Steve is a former business owner in Newport and part of the Upper Kingdom Food Access group. Steve is interested in developing food educational opportunities for the community.

*Lallie Mambourg* - Lallie is the nutrition coordinator for the Northeast Kingdom Council on Aging.

*Katie Haley* - Katie is the Family Assistance Center Specialist for the Vermont Army National Guard, covering eastern Vermont.

*Tammy Lamoureaux, Heidi Cooperstein and LauraLee Sweeney* – Tammy, Heidi, and LauraLee represent Northeast Kingdom Community Action (NEKCA).

*Faye Conte* - Faye is the Advocacy and Education Director at Hunger Free Vermont, and is excited to see such a large and diverse group in attendance.

*Toni Eubanks* - Toni is the librarian at the Barton Public Library, as well as in Glover. [*Jenna publicly thanked Toni for opening up the library to this group.*]

*Jennifer Bernier* - Jenn is the Farm Manager for Fresh Start Community Farm in Newport.

*Alaria O'Brien* - Alaria represents the Vermont Veterans Outreach Program, and works alongside Katie Haley in serving Vermont's veterans.



*Tom Morse* - Tom is a Board Member for Faith in Action, a non-profit group based out of Cabot that coordinates food giveaways across the region.

*Nelson Baker and Madeleine Roy* - Nelson and Madeleine represent Green Mountain United Way, which is also active in the Hunger Council of Washington County.

*Ryan Collins and Rebecca Mitchell* - Ryan and Becca represent Green Mountain Farm to School. Becca is the Consumer Education Coordinator, which includes the Lunch Box program and the Vermont Harvest of the Month.

*Jeff Pierpont* - Jeff is the chairman of the Waldon Selectboard and works for Passumpsic Savings Bank.

*Pastor Alan Parker* - Alan is the Pastor for the United Church of Craftsbury.

*Ginny Flanders and Laural Ruggles* - Ginny and Laural represent Northeastern Vermont Regional Hospital.

*Jane Edwards* - Jane is part of the Upper Kingdom Food Access group, and is focused on education and health. She had done a lot of community outreach, and is hoping to do a small project in Island Pond.

*Ben Doyle* - Ben grew up in Sutton Village, and works for USDA Rural Development, which is looking to support projects in the area.

*Sarah Waring* - Sarah grew up in Glover, and leads the Center for an Agricultural Economy and the Vermont Food Venture Center. Sarah is also standing in for Ruby Dale Brown, who manages the Hardwick Food Pantry. The Food Pantry holds community lessons and clinics that are open to all but aimed for helping people with lower incomes.

*Amy Skelton* - Amy is representing Pete's Greens.

*Alison Low* - Alison represents Northeastern Vermont Development Association.

*Dixie Burns* - Dixie represents Vermont 2-1-1, an information resource coordinated by the United Way.

*Debbie Bach* - Debbie represents the Vermont Department of Health, St. Johnsbury Office.

*Michelle Maitri-Mudita* - Michelle is representing Children's Integrated Services.

*Tracy Collier* - This is Tracy's first week in her new job with the Department for Children and Families' Economic Services Division, where she is helping to kick off a SNAP Ed pilot partnership. 10 states, including Vermont, received federal money to conduct research on job supports for able-bodied SNAP recipients. The pilot will be taking place statewide, and working with the CAP agencies for outreach.

*Dawn Powers* - Dawn represents Building Bright Futures and Children's Integrated services.

*Mary Ellen and Justin Hannington* - Mary Ellen and Justin represent the Island Pond Community Garden, and are part of the Upper Kingdom Food Access group.

*Kinsley Sicard* - Kinsley is the Career Development Facilitator at the Vermont Department of Labor, and works with 3SquaresVT job coordination.

*Bernadette Bisette* - Bernadette is a Nutrition Educator for UVM Extension's EFNEP program.

*Jennifer Hersey Cleveland* - Jennifer is a reporter for the *Caledonian Record* and *Orleans County Record*.

*Bill McMasters* - Bill is a retired UVM Extension Community Development Specialist.

*Penny Thomas* - Penny represents St. Marks, which has a very active food shelf.

*Tim Daley* - Tim is part of the Upper Kingdom Food Access group, and coordinates the "Cooking the Fish" program, a modification of the EFNEP program, which brings community members who can cook to lead 5 week cooking courses that fit lower-income foods and tools. The program will start on January 7<sup>th</sup> at St. Marks.

*Jim Biernat* - Jim represents the Vermont Department of Health, Newport Office.

**Why do we care about hunger?**

*Faye Conte shared an overview of Hunger Free Vermont and the Hunger Council model.*

Hunger Free Vermont is a statewide anti-hunger advocacy and education nonprofit that has been in existence for approximately 25 years (formerly known as the Vermont Campaign to End Childhood Hunger).

As we all know, the cost of living is very high, and food is the most flexible part of a family's budget. As a result, it

is important to focus on helping Vermonters meet their needs without sacrificing their food or nutrition. Hunger Free Vermont does this by:

- helping communities access assistance programs (such as 3SquaresVT and senior meals), working state agencies to make these programs more efficient, and working with people on the ground to make sure these programs are working and reaching the people who need them.
- supporting access to school meals, particularly Universal School Meals (free breakfasts and lunches for all students, regardless of income). The Northeast Kingdom is leading the way in implementing Universal School Meals, which is a testament to the great work being done in this region. Hunger Free Vermont helps provide technical assistance to help these programs work for schools.
- nutrition and cooking education programs. UVM Extension's EFNEP program and the Center for an Agricultural Economy do great work in this area. Hunger Free Vermont offers another option, called *The Learning Kitchen* (TLK), which are series of SNAP education classes.
- advocacy. Hunger Councils help to change policy at the local and state level.

The Hunger Council model started in 2006 in Chittenden and Washington Counties through funding from Northfield Savings Bank. These Councils have been very effective, and with increased funding, Hunger Free Vermont is currently expanding this model to the entire state, including an expansion to Rutland and Bennington in 2016. Hunger Councils bring together a wide range of people to work on hunger and hunger-related issues. Councils help to share the good work that is already being done (which helps avoid reinventing the wheel) and help people come together to make collective change. Hunger Free Vermont helps to facilitate this community space, and we are very excited to be working with all of you in the Northeast Kingdom.

*Faye shared an update on the recent discovery that Hunger Free Vermont has been a victim of embezzlement from within the organization. It has been a very sad and challenging time for the organization, but we are working with federal investigators to address the crime and heal as a staff and board. We are focusing on doing our work, and committed to moving forward. Hunger Free Vermont is very grateful for the outpouring of support from the community.*

### **Overview of work being done in the Northeast Kingdom**

*Brief presentations from local service providers.*

#### **Charitable Food - Tammy Lamoureux, Northeast Kingdom Community Action**

Tammy is new to NEKCA, having started in October, and oversees NEKCA's Food Shelf in Newport. The Food Shelf is not income based – anyone can come in and use this resource. The Food Shelf serves between 700 – 900 households monthly, including a very wide range of people, which has been an eye-opening experience for Tammy. More seniors have been coming in because their social security or SSI benefits are not lasting as long as they used to.

The Food Shelf has been working to raise support in the community through a number of different ways, including the Hunger Bowl (raised money by fundraising with football teams), Hunger Fest (worked with John Edwards from Derby Line to raise \$30,000), and turkey distribution for Thanksgiving (many of the turkeys came from the community, in addition to what was purchased from the Vermont Foodbank).

A grant from VT Fresh has allowed the Food Shelf to get shelving for fresh produce. It has been a challenge to get clients to try the produce, as many don't know what the vegetable are, or how to prepare them. Storage of the produce has also been a challenge, and the Food Shelf is working on getting a new refrigerator.

#### **Child Nutrition Programs – Lenore Beers, Coventry Village School**

*Jenna Banning shared some information on behalf of Lenore Beers, who was unable to find a substitute to take*

*her place in the cafeteria so she could attend the meeting. The group discussed potentially changing the time of the next Council meeting to later in the day so that people who work in schools can attend. The group also discussed the power of Universal School Meals (free meals for all children, regardless of income) in reducing stigma, improving children's learning and behavior, and reducing food costs for families.*

**Health and Food Insecurity – Laural Ruggles, Northeastern Vermont Regional Hospital**

Laural shared that obesity and food insecurity are often tied together, but while obesity affects all incomes, hunger is disproportionately symptomatic of poverty. This is particularly true in the Northeast Kingdom, where income is one of the strongest predictors of health. People with lower incomes have a 50% greater chance of heart disease, and children from families with low incomes are 7 times more likely to have poor health.

The food system is very complicated, and poverty complicates these issues exponentially. Laural is encouraged that the people in this room are working on many hunger issues, and hopes that the group will be able to comprehensively address these challenges by not only improving access to food, but also to job, livable wages, housing, and medical care.

NVRH is on flat land that has great soil, and has a large community garden that was started in the late 70s/early 80s. The garden now has 35 plots, including some multi-family plots. A CSA is available for employees, and through a partnership with the Vermont Foodbank, there will be a produce drop-off at the hospital on the 3<sup>rd</sup> Thursday of every month, starting in January, which will be open to the community.

*Ginny Flanders* shared that they will try to have food tastings relevant to the food being dropped off, as well as tools (i.e. vegetable brushes) to help. *Colleen Moore de Ortiz* praised NVRH's community focus.

**Local Food and Food Access – Jenn Bernier, Fresh Start Community Farm**

Jenn runs the community gardens in Newport, which were started 5 years ago, and now cover a total of 2.8 acres and 27 raised beds across the city, and produce over 15,000 pounds of food to be distributed in the community. Fresh Start Community Farm works with the Vermont Department of Health to coordinate education and recipes for the produce, and conducts significant community outreach (including with schools, the justice system, the Girl Scouts and the Boy Scouts) to include all groups and ages in the farm.

Jenn is looking for funding and resources to start a gleaning program in the Northeast Kingdom, similar to the Willing Hands model operating in the Upper Valley. The Northeast Kingdom is the only region in Vermont that doesn't have a gleaning operation. *Colleen Moore de Ortiz* praised the community garden site on Summer Street in Newport for changing the character of the community.

**Nutrition and Cooking Education – Becca Mitchell, Green Mountain Farm to School**

Becca praised all of the work currently being done on cooking and nutrition education, much of which is not publicized or celebrated. The VT Fresh program does great work to increase access and education in NEKCA, and the regional Head Start programs incorporate a lot of education. Becca was excited to learn about other educational programs operating in the region through this meeting.

Green Mountain Farm to School works over 20 schools in the Northeast Kingdom, and helps to facilitate garden and nutrition education, including harvest with the students, hands-on experiential learning, and recipes for the cafeteria menus to expose students to the food being produced in the garden. Green Mountain Farm to School also operates the Lunch Box program, a summer food service program that serves free, locally-sourced meals for 10 weeks with tasting and educational materials.

GMFTS is also running a pilot program with local retailers. Four hundred SNAP recipients in Essex and Orleans Counties are getting \$75 in coupons to purchase fresh fruits and vegetables at 5 local retailers, which are also hosting tasting and classes.

Becca praised the amount of interest and momentum in the Northeast Kingdom, and feels that the Council will be a great venue to share stories and ideas, and increase collaboration.

**Senior Hunger – Lallie Mambourg, Northeast Kingdom Council on Aging**

Demand for the Meals on Wheels program is very high. The program was established in 1965 through the Older Americans Act, which stated that no one 65 or older can be turned away from a meal. There is a suggested donation (\$3.50), but no one can be turned away if they can't make that donation, which is confidential. The program is funded by federal money which is distributed by the State and the 5 Area Agencies on Aging, and follows federal guidelines for the food. In the Northeast Kingdom, there are 17 different food providers. NEKCOA provides technical assistance, but they are each separate 501(c)(3)s. Some operate congregate meals that are open to everyone (including people under 65 years old). NEKCOA has been seeing more "younger" seniors (55-60 years old) that have been asking for help but are under the age requirement – Lallie is saddened by this, and emphasized that this is indicative of the state of hunger in the region.

In FY 2013/2014, NEKCOA served 180,000 meals throughout the Northeast Kingdom. They are serving more people than ever before through Meals on Wheels, but believe that is not necessarily tied to the physical ability to cook a nutritious meal, but the fact that people don't have enough money to buy food, and this is a way to get at least one nutritious meal in a week. Meals on Wheels deliveries vary in scheduling and frequency throughout the region, and Lallie would like to increase the frequency, especially in the southern catchment area.

Lallie thanked Pete's Greens and Passumpsic Savings Bank for their support and donations. NEKCOA has also been working with GMFTS to 7 years to increase the amount of local fresh fruits and vegetables in meals. NEKCOA has a small amount of money available for meal providers to be flexible with funding, but has already used that up. The increase in volume and lack of flexibility challenges the ability to provide meals. Lallie praised Cornucopia for doing a fabulous job of providing meals with local foods and working with job training, but worries that the program is running low on money and having to cut back on services.

*The Council discussed meal sites and locations across the region, and the challenges of coordinating big food distributions.*

**3SquaresVT / SNAP (formerly food stamps) – Lallie Mambourg, Northeast Kingdom Council on Aging**

Lallie is very supportive of the 3SquaresVT program, which helps people buy the kinds of foods that they want with choice and dignity. The program was intended to be a supplemental food program, but for many, has turned into the majority of their food supply, which is a huge challenge and forces people to figure out how to stretch their money and get food from many other emergency sources (i.e. church meals, food shelves, etc.). Lallie includes information on 3SquaresVT on the Meals on Wheels intake program to try to get seniors to enroll. Many seniors do not want to apply, often because of pride, and the application process can be very difficult because of the paperwork and travel to offices for help in the region's rural areas. However, Lallie strongly encourages people who are eligible to apply, stressing that this is not a 'welfare' program, but a USDA program that helps people buy what they need.

*Faye has worked with 3SquaresVT through her work with Hunger Free Vermont and provided some general information on the program. 3SquaresVT is not a block grant, but varies with need. Funding is currently huge because the need is huge, but participation is slowly declining as people are recovering from the Recession. A few years ago in Vermont, 1 in 6 Vermonters were enrolled; that is now down to approximately 88,000 people.*

**Legislative & Policy Updates**

*Faye Conte, Hunger Free Vermont* – Hunger Free Vermont is informed in their work by the connections formed in the Hunger Councils. The Councils also help to connect the "boots on the ground" with policy-makers, which has made a great difference.

*NOTE: This information has been updated since the Council met, and is current as of December 17<sup>th</sup>, 2015.*

Some hunger-related policy that is timely at the moment is the Child Nutrition Reauthorization (CNR) process.

All child nutrition programs are funded and regulated by the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act – a huge 5 year bill that is similar to the Farm Bill. House and Senate leadership released the text for the omnibus spending bill and tax extenders bill on Wednesday, December 16<sup>th</sup>, 2016, and voted to pass them on Friday, December 18<sup>th</sup>. The Child Nutrition Reauthorization was not included in the omnibus spending bill, and is expected to be considered in early 2016, which will allow opportunities for mark-up and improvements. The Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) and Child Tax Credit have been made permanent, which is a big win for anti-poverty reform. Congressman Welch has been a strong advocate for these tax credits, and co-sponsored the bill in the House to make these permanent.

At the state level, the legislature will be convening in January, and is looking at another year of tight budgets, which will possibly threaten social support services. Faye and others will be advocating against balancing the budget on the back of poor Vermonters, and Faye welcomed suggestions or recommendations from the group.

### **Group Discussion**

*Colleen Moore de Ortiz asked for reactions and feedback.*

*Ben Doyle – With the Universal Recycling Law, food will be diverted from the waste stream, but is there going to be a challenge with storing this food?*

*Jenn Bernier – Jenn stated that this will be a challenge that will occur later; Vermont still needs to first develop the infrastructure and system to capture the food from the dump and from animals. Jenn stated that the State and the current infrastructure has been resistant to the needed changes, but feels that the Northeast Kingdom is very capable of tackling this, and could bring 18 full-time jobs to the area if a facility is built, which she is working on.*

*Alison Low, Sarah Waring, and Ben Doyle described the Food Systems Plan, which was first created in 2010 and identified food systems as a priority. The plan is now being re-written, and is interested in investigating what facilities would be needed, and at what locations. Jenn Bernier shared that she has found people who are willing to give their land for a heat recapture facility, but still needs helping with funding, planning, and architecture. Ben Doyle offered to help.*

*The Council discussed the overlap between private and charitable work in tackling hunger-related issues. Sarah Waring shared examples of how the Center for an Agricultural Economy has found various ways to connect with businesses and banks by being flexible and finding market-based solutions. Jeff Pierpont emphasized that Passumpsic is a community bank, and shared some of the community support that is often conducted without publicity. Jeff also shared his excitement for the group of people who attended this meeting, and feels that this group has a lot of potential.*

*The group discussed what people and groups should be invited to attend future meetings, with the understanding that 'membership' is fluid, and that attendance at the meetings are useful for identifying opportunities for action and making connections. Smaller committees that wish to work between the meetings on specific issues are welcomed, and can be supported by Hunger Free Vermont. Dixie Burns stressed the importance of both creating a long-range plan for increasing food security while also dealing with the immediate needs, and offered to share information and support through her role as a Working Bridges resource officer and the 2-1-1 information system.*

### **Set Priorities and Agenda Topics for the coming year**

*The group discussed potential priorities for the coming year. Colleen, Faye, and Jenna will be meeting in early 2016 to set dates, and will send out a notice in January.*