


# Legacy *Matters*



The State of the  
Valley's Mental  
Health Post  
Pandemic

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## Sponsored Events:

### Sept. 24, 2022:

3rd Annual Light the Valley CT Shine.  
Breast cancer & breast health awareness.  
Three Saints Park. Bethany.  
[www.bosonii.com](http://www.bosonii.com)

### Sept. 30-Oct. 2, 2022:

11th Annual Pounding the Pavement for Pink,  
[www.seymourpink.com/race-info](http://www.seymourpink.com/race-info)

### Oct. 14, 2022:

Dancing with the Stars  
To benefit Adams House.  
Birchwoods Banquet Facility,  
Woodbridge.  
[www.adamshousect.org](http://www.adamshousect.org)

### Nov. 15, 2022:

(8am-10am) VCF's unveiling of the 2022 Valley Community Index, Center Stage Theatre. Call 203-751-9162 to reserve a seat.



## About the Valley Community Foundation

Established in 2004, the Valley Community Foundation (VCF) distributes approximately \$2 million in grants annually that support local nonprofits, programs, and students. Along with discretionary grant-making, VCF manages more than 268 charitable funds to support Valley causes and organizations.

VCF also works in close partnership with The Community Foundation for Greater New Haven and receives funding from the Gates Fund and other preference funds that benefit the Valley. For more information about VCF, or if you would like to donate or create a fund, call 203-751-9162, or visit: [www.valleyfoundation.org](http://www.valleyfoundation.org).

## Smart Investment The State of the Valley's Mental Health Post Pandemic

For nearly three years, the COVID-19 pandemic has wreaked havoc in almost every way on our Valley, state, and country. It infected and caused the death of more than one-million people nationwide, shuttered countless businesses, emptied schools and offices, and hobbled a once robust and growing economy.

But the pandemic, and its byproducts -- isolation, fear and uncertainty -- has also had a serious negative impact on the long-term mental health and wellbeing of many Valley residents, area experts say.

In spring of 2021, about 31-percent of adults in the U.S. reported symptoms of anxiety and/or depression, compared to 11-percent in 2019, according to the Kaiser Family Foundation.

Valley trends tend to mirror national statistics, and the statistics for 2022 are unlikely to improve. The national declining trend on mental health wellness during the last few years reflects what agencies and nonprofits throughout the Valley are coping with today.

"The numbers are still up from pre-pandemic numbers," said Michael Wynne, the Community Engagement Specialist with BHcare. "They may have leveled off some, which is good, but they haven't gone down either."

BHcare, a Certified Community Behavioral Health Clinic, is just one of many area agencies seeing a serious and sustaining uptick in cases and requests for services.

"We have 100 new intake calls each month," said Marcy Rende, Executive Director of the Christian Counseling and Family Life Center. The center is an outpatient behavioral health nonprofit serving individuals, couples, and families in Shelton and surrounding towns.

Caseloads for area social workers, behavioral clinicians, and other healthcare providers, have skyrocketed. Basically, increased cases of mental health problems, substance abuse and domestic violence -- that jumped during the pandemic -- have not subsided.

"A community won't function effectively if the people in that community can't function to their fullest capacity so what we're doing is essential," Rende said.

Wynne said the pandemic itself was horrible enough. Hospitals and medical staffs were pushed to the brink and many people got sick and died. But he said the pandemic's unforeseen impact was then made even worse by quarantines.

"Domestic violence victims were locked away with their abusers, resulting in increased and more severe cases of abuse," he said. "We were also seeing a crisis in our hospital emergency departments, including more overdoses and substance abuse as well as suicides and suicidal behaviors. That gave us a picture of a more-desperate population."

Wynne said when the pandemic started, many thought it would last a few weeks or maybe a few months, and their initial concern was for children.

He said most referrals to the Parent Child Resource Center, a BHcare program, originate in the schools as teachers bring concerns to parents when students appear to be struggling. Parents are then referred to the Center to get help and avoid serious disciplinary issues for their child or an impact on the child's learning. But during the pandemic, when school were mostly closed, such referrals to the Center dropped off dramatically.

# Smart Investment

## The State of the Valley's Mental Health Post Pandemic



"We knew that parents were challenged as they tried to work, or deal with unemployment, while supporting their children's education in a virtual environment," Wynne said. "They were handling considerable stress, especially low-income families who have fewer resources."

Now, just as the Valley starts to recover from the pandemic, another negative outcome has come to light. There has been a notable number of clinicians and other behavioral healthcare workers who have chosen to take jobs in the private sector or quit their profession outright.

"People are leaving these fields because of the caseloads and stress," Wynne said. "The pandemic really changed how everyone does their job now, but for clinicians and social workers it just became extremely hard, and there are still a lot of people dealing with burnout."

Erin Marino, program director at Ansonia Behavioral Health at Cornell Scott Hill Health Center, an agency providing medical services, including behavioral health, women's health, infectious

diseases treatment and addiction services, said medical professionals are struggling.

"It can be tough at times on all sides," Marino said. "Therapists are going through the same things during the pandemic and watched clients as well as their own family members pass away from COVID."

However, there may be some help, and hope on the horizon. In August, in response to the exodus of healthcare workers in Connecticut, state officials allocated \$35 million to help bolster the ranks of nurses and mental health providers by funding tuition and training for those entering the fields or expanding their credentials.

Wynne, Rende and Marino said the additional state funding for education and training will help, but in the meantime current clinicians, and mental health workers are stretched to the limits and even more stressed by carrying the caseloads left by their former colleagues.

They also say that the last few years have been dark at times, but there have been some positive outcomes too.

Marino said her agency, like many others, is adapted to a "new normal" by offering virtual and phone services in addition to in-person sessions.

"Tele-Medicine has made healthcare more accessible for people who can't get to the clinic or have childcare issues," Marino added. "At the same time, there are drawbacks. When we can't see someone in person, we can't observe them and their mannerisms."

Wynne, Marino and Rende also said the pandemic did spotlight mental health issues in the community and made people more aware, and sympathetic to the plight of those living with mental illness, addiction, or both.

"I think the effects of the pandemic is something we're going to struggle with for years to come," Rende said. "In response, agencies like ours will continue to do the work we're doing."

"We're still wearing masks in the clinic and I'm not sure that will ever go away, just as the opioid epidemic has not gone away," Marino said. "If I wanted people to know one thing, it's that we're here for them."

"There's a lot of uncertainty," Wynne said. "However, the level of collaboration among agencies, not just mental health agencies, is remarkable. That's a really positive part of working in the Valley and VCF has been a part of that, getting us involved in the Valley 2022 Community Index and talking about the problems."

*The Smart Investment segment of Legacy Matters spotlights issues the Valley Community Foundation believes are worthy of your time, talent, and treasure.*



## Featured Fund

### *Bassett Family Fund*

With more than 268 charitable funds in the care of the Valley Community Foundation (VCF), it's difficult to spotlight one, over another.

Some are scholarships for students pursuing academics or careers in trades, others are funds earmarked to help all kinds of nonprofits. But all have a one common trait -- all make a true positive impact on our Valley.

For Roberta J. Cook, President and CEO of BH*care*, one VCF fund and family, stands out as special.

"The Bassett Family Fund is a lifeline for BH*care* and helps us provide services for thousands of adults, children, and families in the Valley and beyond each year," Cook said. "We value our longstanding partnership, and the Bassett Family's continued dedication to BH*care*, our mission, and the people we serve."

BH*care*, a Certified Community Behavioral Health Clinic, provides a myriad of safety net services, from mental health and addiction services, domestic violence prevention, children's services, housing and other programs.

In 2005, VCF founding Board member, William C. "Bill" Bassett, and his wife, Judy, established the Bassett Family Fund to support area nonprofits.

The Bassett family can trace their New England roots back to 1642, when their forebears journeyed from England. But it would be a 20th Century Bassett, nearly 300 years later, that would make his mark in Connecticut, and the Valley.

William E. Bassett was very mechanical and in 1939, at 25, he used those skills to start The W.E. Bassett Company, a small general machine shop. During World War II, it made mostly munition components.

But in 1947, he re-designed a small steel nail clipper that would change his company and family forever. His TRIM clippers were so popular, the company grew to be one of the most prosperous manufacturers of nailcare and personal grooming products in the United States.

In 1955, William E. Bassett, due to illness, was unable to return to work fulltime. Harry Bassett, his older brother, stepped in and ran the company. Like his brother, Harry was very generous and credited the people of the Valley with helping the company grow.

Harry ran the company until 1981 when his nephew, William C. "Bill" Bassett, assumed the leadership role. It was this culture of philanthropy that



*The Bassett Family: Bill Bassett, Jr., William C. Bassett, Betsy Bassett DePaolo, Judy Bassett, Lynne Bassett Perry.*

was passed down by Harry to Bill, and from Bill, and Judy, to their children, Lynne, Betsy, and Bill, Jr.

In 2011, the company and TRIM brand were sold. That's when Lynne Bassett Perry said her family decided to donate some of the proceeds from the sale into the family fund. The family wanted to support the Valley's nonprofits just like the company always did.

Since 2005, the Bassett Family Fund has gifted more than \$2.5 million to support dozens of area programs and nonprofits.

"We are very fortunate to be able to continue the philanthropy started long ago by my grandfather, great uncle, and continued by our father," Lynne Bassett Perry said. "Philanthropy really is one of our family's core values."

## Planned Giving

VCF welcomes Leslie Bondos, John Corrado, Gregg Goumas, Edward Fogarty, Peter Francini, Barry & Josephine Lifrieri, Carol Pendagest, and Lynn Wozniak to the Gates Society, the Valley Community Foundation's planned giving community.

**Your planned gift will impact the charities you're passionate about forever, regardless of the amount. Call us at 203-751-9162 or learn more at [valleyfoundation.org](http://valleyfoundation.org)**



# Community Investment

## Area Nonprofits and Programs Awarded VCF Grants

This summer, the Valley Community Foundation (VCF) and its Board of Directors granted \$431,000 to 19 area nonprofits. The recipients provide a wide range of services in the Valley, from food assistance programs, youth services, and education, to healthcare, arts and culture initiatives, and public safety.

Six organizations received multi-year responsive grants totaling \$401,000. There were also 13 Valley nonprofits that received single-year community grants totaling \$30,000.



*The Valley Community Foundation  
Headquarters, Derby CT*

The Kathleen Samela Food Pantry at Christ Episcopal Church in Ansonia received \$96,000 over three years to provide food to several thousand Valley residents.

“Without this money, we would not be able continue to provide the life-changing services to our Valley’s most vulnerable residents,” said Meme Yocher, the food pantry’s coordinator. “Food insecurity is at an all-time high in the Valley and this grant is a real lifesaver.”

VCF’s multi-year responsive grants are awarded to help nonprofits with unrestricted funding. “These grants, allow recipients financial stability, a critical factor for struggling nonprofits especially during the COVID-19 recovery process, said Sharon Closius, VCF’s President and CEO.

“As we all work to build a better Valley and fortify it from the negative impacts of the pandemic, it’s important to recognize just how much our area nonprofits do for the community,” Closius said. “Helping them succeed, helps us all succeed and supporting these organizations, especially allowing the flexibility of using unrestricted grant money, helps strengthen our region as a whole.”

This year’s community grant process was well represented by grassroots organizations working with traditionally underserved populations throughout the region. “VCF is committed to expanding support to communities of color in an effort to truly make a positive change in equity and inclusion in our Valley,” said Valerie Knight-Di Gangi, VCF’s Program Officer.

VCF’s Responsive Grantmaking program is done with its partner in philanthropy, The Community Foundation for Greater New Haven (TCF). The program is funded by a generous annual grant from TCF’s Gates Fund, and other VCF field of interest and unrestricted funds.

### 2022 VCF Responsive Grant Recipients:

- Center Stage Theatre - \$35,000.
- Christ Episcopal Church - \$96,000.
- Echo Hose Hook & Ladder Ambulance Corps - \$105,000.
- Life Health and Wellness Center - \$60,000.
- Shelton Economic Development Corp - \$45,000.
- Valley Shakespeare Festival - \$60,000.

### 2022 VCF Community Grants:

- All-American Valley Basketball Club - \$2,500.
- Annual Thanksgiving Basket Committee - \$2,500.
- Ansonia Rotary Club - \$2,430.
- Derby Boy Scouts Troop 3 - \$2,500.
- cARTie - \$2,470.
- Derby High School Beekeepers - \$2,500.
- Irving School Food Pantry - \$2,500.
- The Richi-Dee’s BBQ Table Project - \$1,200.
- Seymour Soccer Association - \$2,500.
- Shelton Farmers Market - \$2,400.
- Southford Falls Quilting Guild - \$2,500.
- Trinity Episcopal Church - \$2,500.
- Valley Historical Research Committee - \$1,500.

VCF’s Community grants are geared towards volunteer and nonprofits groups in Ansonia, Derby, Oxford, Seymour, and Shelton that have less than two full-time or four part-time employees. These grants range from \$250 to \$2,500 and can be for new or recurring programs that support civic and community engagement.

# Good News About the Valley

## 2022 Valley Community Index

**M**ark your calendars and join us November 15, 2022 -- 8am-10am -- at Center Stage Theatre in Shelton as we unveil the 2022 Valley Community Index!

More than 50 community stakeholders have participated in bi-weekly work-group sessions from March through July. The work groups have gathered and reviewed detailed data and demographics on behavioral health, transportation, the Impact of COVID-19, health and equity, and other issues impacting the Valley.

This year, new surveys were distributed to Valley residents, and the outcome conveyed concerns about physical and behavioral health, maternal and infant health issues, as well as chronic disease management.

The work groups also hosted several community Listening Sessions to get direct feedback from Valley residents on matters and issues utmost concerning to them which are being incorporated into the final document.

Seating is limited, so if you would like to join us in-person for this very important community event, please call 203-751-9162 to reserve a seat. But if you can't attend don't worry, we will be streaming it live on our Facebook page too.

## Annual Reception Returns

**O**n May 17, 2022, the Valley Community Foundation held its Annual Reception at the Race Brook Country Club, the first in-person reception in more than three years!

About 120 people attended and received our 2021 Annual Report and learned about the 16 new funds established last year. That's right, sixteen!

"Despite what our region has gone through these last few years, it was wonderful to see the joy on everyone's face when we gathered," said Sharon Closius, VCF's President and CEO. "Sixteen new funds, a record, is a true testament to the generous spirit of giving that's the heart and soul of our Valley."

At the reception, along with the stories about the new funds, there was great food, camaraderie, and a chance for VCF staff, volunteers, and supporters to catch up after three years of pandemic-related issues. To see a copy of the 2021 Annual Report and pictures and videos from our Annual Reception, please go to our website: [www.valleyfoundation.org](http://www.valleyfoundation.org).

