

## Update from the Field of Afterschool, Summer, and Third Space Programs 2024

**The Future of Universal Afterschool and Summer in Vermont.** Through universal afterschool and summer, Vermont has the unprecedented opportunity to ensure **every youth** who wants to attend an afterschool and summer program in our state has the opportunity to do so.

**A universal afterschool and summer model is a solution for all kids, all families, and all communities across our state.** Every young person will know they have a place to go after school and over the summer, and every Vermont parent or caregiver will know their kids are safe and cared for when they can't be at home. Youth will be able to discover purpose and passions, build protective factors, develop workforce and life skills, and receive academic support.



By building this system, every young person in every community will know that we believe that young people make a better Vermont. By 2025, Vermont will be well on its way to ensuring that youth and families who want to participate in high-quality afterschool and summer programming are able to do so because programs will be universally available, accessible, and affordable.

**Vermont as a National Example.** Vermont has long been looked to by the national afterschool and summer field, and that has only increased in the past few years. Other states and research organizations consistently call upon Vermont to share the state's efforts towards universal afterschool.

## HISTORY OF THIS EFFORT

- **2014:** The discussion of afterschool and summer expansion began before Governor Scott took Office. For example, the Legislature created an Extended Learning Opportunities (ELO) Working Group almost a decade ago. Their reports in 2014 and 2015 make recommendations for a state level fund and grant program to expand access to afterschool and summer learning programs. The group laid out the ideal prioritization as: low-income children and youth, underserved areas of the state, programs for middle and high school youth, etc. It also recommends that a cross-agency, cross-sector oversight committee be established to reflect a **broad array of program types and stakeholders**. An ELO account was created at the Agency of Education, but never fully funded.
  
- **2019:** During Governor's Scott's tenure, Vermont allocated \$600,000 from the Tobacco Settlement to increase access to afterschool and summer learning programs in 2019. That money was administered through CDD via a grant to Vermont Afterschool. The grant process to distribute the funds followed the recommendations outlined in the ELO Working Group report, Closing the Gap. In the first round of the grants, Vermont Afterschool collected over 100 proposals with requests totaling close to \$5.5 million (over two years). In fall 2020, the Vermont Community Foundation awarded Vermont Afterschool an additional \$50,000 to combine with any remaining Tobacco funds and run a second round of Afterschool for All.
  
- **2020:**
  - **State of the State Vision:** In his 2020 State of the State Address, the Governor laid out a universal afterschool and summer target for 2025, and asked the Legislature to work with him to develop a plan. That vision outlined working with communities to support local input on types of programming – not reinventing the wheel if they already offered programming through their school via 21C, a licensed program, or other funds, but inviting other entities into the work to supplement and enhance existing efforts or to fill gaps where no options existed. The Administration has been intentional about supporting a mixed delivery from the outset.
  
  - **State Funding Source via Cannabis Revenue:** Subsequently, when S.54, creating a cannabis market, was being negotiated between the Governor and the Legislature, the Governor laid out his priorities for public safety and prevention. One important piece of that was dedicating the sales and use tax for a grant program to start or expand afterschool and summer learning program: *17c. DEDICATED USE OF SALES AND USE TAX ON CANNABIS* ***Notwithstanding 16 V.S.A. § 4025(b)***, revenue from the sales and use tax imposed by 32 V.S.A. chapter 233 on retail sales of cannabis or cannabis products in this State shall be used to fund a grant program to start or expand afterschool and summer learning programs, with a focus on increasing

*access in underserved areas of the State.* This language did not prescribe a delivery model, nor limit eligible grant recipients in any way- instead focusing on increasing access and underserved areas of the state.

Unfortunately, while this language dedicated the funding to a specific use, it did not delineate a receiving Agency to run the grant program. There was time to clean that up, as revenue would not start accruing until FY24.

- **Universal Afterschool Task Force:** Finally, as an outgrowth of the 2020 efforts, the Legislature mandated a Universal Afterschool Task Force to create a plan and recommendations to meet the 2025 target. Their report put forward a set of recommendations that also supported a mixed delivery model for this funding, and certain standards private/non-profit providers should be asked to meet.
- **2021:** The State was able to jump start afterschool and summer expansion using education federal relief funding (ESSER) during the summer of 2021. The Governor prioritized making sure our youth had opportunities to reengage with their peers and communities after being in lock down and remote learning settings for much of the previous year. In that Federal relief funding, public schools received a direct allocation from the federal government and were required to use a percentage on afterschool and summer programming. To mirror that opportunity, the Governor convened an interagency task force via EO (separate and complimentary to the legislatively mandated group) to immediately deploy a portion of the State set aside funds to launch the Summer Matters grant competition (more detail below) to support private, non-profit, and municipal summer program settings. This program was widely celebrated by the Legislature, Administration, and general public and prioritized increasing access and geographic diversity.



- **2022 - 2023:**

- **Expanding Access Grant:** A second grant opportunity, also using ESSER funding was launched to cover summer 2022, fall 2022, spring 2023, and part of summer 2023. This was called the Expanding Access Grant. The Administration continued to keep the Legislature abreast of this grant, and outcomes (more details below).

- **Interagency Task Force Highlights:** the Administration’s interagency task force created via EO continued to convene in pursuit of expanding access. Examples of some of those efforts include:

- Publishing ‘Vermont Guidelines for Afterschool, Summer, and Youth Development Programs;

- Vermont Afterschool, in collaboration with the Youth Career Exploration Subcommittee completed a pilot during the summer of 2023 to engage middle and early high school-aged youth in workforce-readiness and career exploration opportunities, including real-world application in the community. Four programs, representing different areas of the state participated, and demographics for youth included 50% qualifying for free and reduced lunch, 27% English Language Learner, 11% of youth with a disability, and 27% identifying as BIPOC.
    - HireAbility launched a highly successful Summer Career Exploration Program for eligible youth;
    - The Youth Career Exploration Subcommittee is providing resources to employers to better support youth in their employment.
  - **Budget Language:** In the FY24 budget, the Administration and Legislature cleaned up the cannabis language, as the cannabis sales tax revenue began accruing, so we could transition away from the federal relief funds. The budget sent the funds to the Agency of Education, and prescribed the following:
    - (1) Grants shall be used to support a mixed delivery system for afterschool and summer programming. Eligible recipients can be public, private, or nonprofit organizations.*
    - (2) Grants may be used for technical assistance, program implementation, program expansion, program sustainability, and related costs.*
    - (3) Grants may be used to directly target communities with low existing capacity to serve youth in afterschool and summer settings.*

The budget also reconstituted the Interagency Task Force and put it into session law as an Advisory Committee to the AOE.
  - **Act 78 Grant Program:** In December 2023, the Administration launched the first grant program using the cannabis funds, which is currently accepting applications in accordance with the budget language from public, private, and nonprofit organizations. The Administration has been clear with the field at large that we will be prudent and not make awards until after the BAA passes.
- **2024:** This pending FY 24 BAA supports the policy trajectory of Afterschool and Summer from what has been established and voted on by the Legislature. The Administration and Joint Fiscal Office reached consensus on this Fund construct before introducing it. With this fund internal accounting constructs will be cleaned up and further refined. The Administration heard the concerns of House members about adding stronger non-discrimination language and are amenable to doing so in collaboration with members of both Legislative bodies.

## AFTERSCHOOL AND SUMMER LEARNING ADVISORY COMMITTEE

- **Cross-Agency Collaboration as a Best Practice.** The importance of partnership and cross-agency collaboration at the state level is a success model and is highlighted nationally. Having a wide variety of state agencies at the table allows for broad scale efforts intertwined into multiple initiatives and stakeholder groups.
  - **Purpose.** The Advisory Committee, which transitioned from the Task Force established via EO, will advise and consult with the Agency of Education as cannabis funds are deployed to expand access in the mixed delivery system.
  - **Membership.** The Advisory Committee membership includes representatives from the Department for Children and Families; the Department of Health; the Department of Mental Health; the Department of Fish & Wildlife; the Agency of Commerce and Community Development; HireAbility; the Governor’s Office; the Chief Prevention Officer; and Vermont Afterschool.
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## OUTCOMES & IMPACT

### SUMMER MATTERS FOR ALL GRANT PROGRAM & INITIATIVE (2021)

- In 2021, Governor Scott directed \$4 million in federal funding to support expanded learning for Vermont youth through the **Summer Matters for All Grant Program**. Vermont Afterschool worked closely with the Agency of Education, the Governor’s office, and the Interagency Afterschool Youth Task Force to establish and administer the grant program, which prioritized summer learning sites that reached students with disabilities or unique needs; provided transportation; and offered low- or no-cost programs for eligible students. The federal funds were secured by **Senator Sanders**.
  - **High Demand and Field Willingness.** The field of afterschool, summer, and youth-serving organizations readily stepped up to help youth and families. The program received **188 proposals** from providers across the state requesting \$7.4 million in projects.
  - **Impact by the numbers.**
    - **92** subrecipients across the state
    - **12,877** youth served
    - **5,528** new slots created
    - **1,313** youth with special needs served
    - **492** high school & college-aged young people were able to work in summer programs, gaining valuable skills.
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### AFTERSCHOOL AND SUMMER EXPANDING ACCESS GRANT PROGRAM (2022-2023)

- **Investment.** In late winter 2022, the Agency of Education leveraged an additional **\$4.23M** in ESSER II funds, and the Task Force identified Vermont Afterschool to

administer the Afterschool and Summer Expanding Access Grant for summer 2022, afterschool 2022-2023, and part of summer 2023. The Agency of Education recently awarded us additional funds bringing the total investment for this grant program to **\$4.7M** and **50 grantees**.

- **Impact.**
  - **6,468** unique youth served in summer 2022; 18,080 across three separate award periods 6,622 new program slots created
  - **748** additional weeks of programming
  - Programs had to choose at least one strategy area, with most choose multiple strategy areas. These included: addressing affordability; creating new programs in parts of the State with few or no options available; increasing program slots; increasing weeks or days offered; and ensuring underserved youth are represented and can fully participate.

<b>Strategy for Expanding Access</b>	<b>Number of Programs Implementing the Strategy</b> <i>*Programs were able to choose more than 1 strategy area.</i>
Addressing Affordability	38
Creating New Programs in Parts of the State with Few or No Options Available	30
Increasing Program Slots	42
Increasing Weeks or Days Offered	38
Ensuring Underserved Youth are Represented and Can Fully Participate	47

**EXPANDING SCHOOL-AGE CHILDCARE (2022-2023)**

- **Room for Me Grant Program.** Vermont Afterschool bid for the Child Development Division’s project to increase school-age child care and afterschool capacity by:
  - Expanding the amount of child care and afterschool capacity throughout Vermont;
  - Increasing school-age slots in year-round child care programs;
  - Increasing the number of programs that accept CCFAP thereby expanding opportunities for Vermont children and youth; and
  - Supporting the child care needs of families, especially in underserved communities.

- This is part of the strategy to braid funds to achieve Universal Afterschool and Summer.
    - **Projected Impact.** Programs have just been awarded with **915** new slots projected and new slots in individual programs ranging **5 – 48**, depending on the program’s size and type.
    - To date, **nearly 1.5 million** has been awarded to **23** grantees – including new programs and expansion projects.
    - A mini grant program is open now to distribute additional funds.
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### **AFTERSCHOOL AND SUMMER LEARNING PROGRAMS GRANT PROGRAM (2023 – 2025)**

**Investment.** Using \$3.5m of the available cannabis revenue from FY24, the Agency of Education has launched a 3-year grant opportunity for public (schools) and community partners. Applicants must meet **at least two** of the Absolute Priorities defined below:

- **Absolute Priority 1:** The Agency of Education will prioritize awards for applications that utilize school-community partnership model to deliver programming.
- **Absolute Priority 2:** The Agency of Education will prioritize awards for applications where there is evidence of no or limited afterschool program options currently available for children and youth in the applicant community(s).
- **Absolute Priority 3:** The Agency of Education will prioritize awards to applications designed to improve access and remove barriers to participation for students from Historically Marginalized Groups.

This grant is currently live and applications will be accepted until March 6<sup>th</sup>. More can be found, here: [Grant Announcement: Act 78 Afterschool and Summer Learning Programs | Agency of Education \(vermont.gov\)](#)

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### **ADDITIONAL INVESTMENTS IN RECENT YEARS**

- **CTE and STEM Afterschool and Summer Activities.** The Governor used a portion of available **GEER** funds to provide CTE and STEM afterschool and summer activities. AOE contracted with various providers (CTE centers, FIRST Robotics, etc.) to offer tech-oriented after school and summer school programming for **\$564,000**.
- **ARP ESSER Summer and Afterschool Grants to Local Education Agencies (LEAs).** AOE used the mandated State Education Agency (SEA) ARP ESSER set-aside of \$2.8M to supplement and expand afterschool and summer programs to LEAs (supervisory unions, school districts, schools), including existing 21C programs. Announcements and project summaries can be found here: <https://education.vermont.gov/covid-19/education-recovery-and-revitalization/current-funding-opportunities>
- **Local Education Agency (LEA) funding.** In addition, LEA’s received allocations based on their Title I share that could support afterschool and summer activities.
- **Act 112 Mental Health and Well-being.** With the Legislature’s support, the Agency of Education used ARP ESSER SEA funds to fund mental health and wellness supports for students, families, and staff in schools, CTE’s, and afterschool



programs. Grantees were awarded the two-year grants.

<https://education.vermont.gov/documents/arp-esser-act-112-mental-health-and-well-being-grant-recipients>

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## MOVING FORWARD

- **Act 76 Childcare Package.** Act 76 investments will expand and strengthen regulated programs that offer summer and afterschool opportunities to children.
  - Expansion of the Child Care Financial Assistance Program (CCFAP) will make afterschool and summer care in programs regulated by the Child Development Division more affordable for families and more viable for the programs. CDD currently supports 2,244 school-aged children through CCFAP. With upcoming CCFAP eligibility expansion, upwards of 7,500 students would be eligible for financial assistance if the program they attend a regulated program. CCFAP is an ongoing funding stream that can complement grant-initiated expansions or services.
  - Act 76 Readiness Payments are already flowing to regulated afterschool programs and center-based child care programs that accept or are willing to accept CCFAP. These funds have reached over 450 programs serving school-agers and over 120 programs have indicated they intend to increase the number of school-agers they serve.
  - Specialized Child Care services are also eligible to children with a disability or other adverse circumstances served by regulated child care programs. In these cases, community-based Specialized Child Care coordinators work with the family and the program to support full inclusion, the program receives an increased reimbursement, transportation can be provided if needed, and grants for special accommodations (such as a ramp or a one-on-one aide) can be provided.
  
- **Research.**
  - The Administration and Vermont Afterschool are partnering with the Wallace Foundation on the following:
    1. Merging and analyzing programming data sets. We need to update our existing program map utilized by families to something that is more “evergreen,” with afterschool and summer program options; and to better understand existing capacity at the town and school district levels when looking at number of existing licensed slots.
    2. Providing technical assistance and accountability for us as we begin a more hands on approach to building program capacity in our smaller towns. We will test and update the Vermont Afterschool ‘How to Guides’ to ground truth where we believe the barriers are; and where additional support is needed.



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## AFTERSCHOOL LANDSCAPE

- **Afterschool and Summer Program Types.** There are many types of programs currently meeting the needs of children, youth, and their families, by providing afterschool and summer programming. They often braid multiple funding streams and overlap in their type. For example, a program can be operated by a school district and be a licensed afterschool program through the Child Development Division. Or, a licensed afterschool program may also be a nonprofit.
  - **Regulated Child Care Programs** serve children and youth up to the age of 13 and are overseen by the Child Development Division. This includes licensed afterschool programs, center based child care program providers, and family child care homes. Entities can include LEAs, municipalities, nonprofits, or for-profit businesses such as a rock-climbing gym that offers a summer program.
  - **21<sup>st</sup> Century Community Learning Centers (21C)** are overseen by the Agency of Education. Eligible applicants can be an Local Education Agency (LEA), community-based organizations (nonprofits, child care programs), municipalities, and other public or private entities. These programs are exempt from Child Care regulations, but many programs choose to follow them to have access to child care funds.
  - **Other Exempt Programs.** These are exempt because they serve youth older than age 13 or operate for less than 13 weeks per year. Many summer programs are in this category.
- **Afterschool Funding Streams.** Several federal funding streams can support summer and afterschool programs. The Wallace Foundation and Education Counsel recently published the [Building, Sustaining and Improving: Using Federal Funds for Summer Learning and Afterschool](#) guide to identify these sources including:
  - **Title IV, Part B – 21<sup>st</sup> Century Community Learning Centers (21C).** Vermont has a robust 21C program funded and managed by the Agency of Education serving on average, 100 sites in communities across Vermont.
  - **Child Care Development Block Grant (CCDBG).** The funding, administered through the Department for Children and Families, allows states to provide financial assistance to low-income families to access child care so caregivers can work or attend a job training or educational program. The funding follows the child or youth to whichever program they are attending as a way to lower the cost for their families. This funding is administered through the Child Development Division, and between licensed afterschool programs and center-based child care programs who serve school-agers, the Child Development Division supports 230+ programs who provide afterschool and summer programming.

- **CRRSAA (ESSER II) and ARP ESSER.** While temporary funding sources, these funds are being used at both the LEA and State level as different, but complementary, strategies to ensure all children and youth are able to access programs during the height of the pandemic and initial recovery years.
- The Wallace Foundation and Education Counsel guide also lists 12 other funding sources that could be used to support afterschool and summer. Many of these are incorporated into existing strategies in Vermont related to workforce, STEM and career exploration, full-service community schools, meeting the needs of families, and more.
- **Multiple Funding Streams.** Braiding funding streams allows afterschool and summer programs to develop financially strong, high-quality programs with fairly compensated staff and affordable opportunities for youth and their families.
- **Mixed Delivery Model.** To date, there has been consensus that flexibility is a key design element for the system, as “every community in Vermont has a unique mix of resources, partners, strengths, and opportunities.”<sup>1</sup> Limiting the applicant pool to LEAs only would limit opportunities for the growth of proven community-based models and put the responsibility for summer and afterschool care onto our already overloaded schools. Vermont families value and seek out afterschool and summer opportunities from a variety of community partners include parks and recreation departments, libraries, trusted nonprofits, and family child care programs located in their neighborhoods. In consensus with the original Universal Afterschool Task Force, each iteration of the grant programs have been open to a wide variety of entities including schools, nonprofit organizations, municipalities, and licensed childcare centers to ensure increased access, increased slots, geographic diversity and programming to meet a wide variety of youth interests and family need.

## DATA

### List of Afterschool and Expanding Access Grantees

Program Name	County
Audubon Vermont	Chittenden
Beaver Brook Children’s School	Windham
Bennington County Regional Commission (dba North Bennington Intergenerational Arts and Wellness Camps and Afterschool Collaborative)	Bennington
Berkshire Family YMCA	Bennington
Blake Memorial Library	Orange
Boys and Girls Club of Brattleboro	Windham

<sup>1</sup> Report from Vermont’s Universal Afterschool Task Force, May 2021.

<https://education.vermont.gov/documents/edu-legislative-report-universal-afterschool-20210518>

Boys and Girls Club of Greater Vergennes	Addison
Cabot Public Library	Washington
Camp Agape Vermont, Inc.	Washington
Catamount Film and Arts	Caledonia
Circus Smirkus	Orleans
City of Barre, Vermont	Washington
City of Burlington, Vermont, Parks, Recreation, and Waterfront Department and Fletcher Free Library	Chittenden
Cutler Memorial Library	Washington
Essex Junction Recreation and Parks	Chittenden
Governor's Institute of Vermont	Chittenden/Statewide
In Tandem Arts	Chittenden
Jaquith Public Library	Washington
King Street Center	Chittenden
Kingdom Trails Association	Caledonia
Meeting Waters YMCA	Windham
Middlebury Community Music Center	Addison
Milton Family Community Center	Chittenden
Montpelier Parks and Trees Department	Washington
Mosaic Vermont, Inc.	Washington
Northern Vermont Area Health Education Center	Caledonia
Oak Hill Children's Center	Bennington
Patch of Diamonds, Inc.	Windham
Purple Crayon Productions (dba Artistree Community Arts Center)	Windsor
ReTribe	Chittenden
River Arts of Morrisville	Lamoille
Rockingham Free Public Library	Windham
Rural Arts Collaborative	Orleans
Rutland County Parent Child Center	Rutland
SafeArt, Inc.	Orange
Sage Mountain Botanical Sanctuary	Orange
Shader Croft School	Chittenden
The Barra School	Orange
The DREAM Program, Inc.	Franklin
The MINT: Rutland's Community Makerspace	Rutland
The Root Social Justice Center	Windham
The Southern Vermont Natural History Museum	Windham
The Willowell Foundation, Inc.	Addison
United Children's Services of Bennington County	Bennington
Vermont Folklife Center	Addison
Vermont Wilderness School, Inc.	Windham

Very Merry Theatre	Chittenden
Whitingham Free Public Library	Windham
Wilmington Recreation Commission	Windham
Youth Services, Inc.	Windham

## PROGRAM STORIES

**Ensuring Underserved Youth are Represented and Can Fully Participate.** According to 2019 data from the [Youth Risk Behavior Survey](#), high school students in Vermont who are “racial or ethnic minorities” are less likely than their white peers to participate in extracurricular/ afterschool activities. The survey continues to report that students who identify as LGBTQIA+ are similarly less likely to participate in extracurricular activities than their heterosexual and cisgender peers.<sup>2</sup> In *Equity and Inclusion: An Action Agenda for Youth Development Professionals*, author Jennifer Siaca Curry writes that afterschool and expanded learning programs can and should make “an explicit commitment to equity, inclusion, and culturally responsive practice.”<sup>3</sup> 94% of our subrecipients utilized Expanding Access grant funding to ensure underserved youth were well represented in their programs and had the resources necessary to fully participate. Two of those programs were Youth Services (Friends for Change) and the City of Burlington Parks, Recreation, and Waterfront Department.

- Youth Services (Friends for Change). Friends for Change Co-Coordinator, Hailee Galandak-Cochran writes that “the issues related to systemic poverty, racism, and ableism that our youth/ families face affects their ability to access all community resources, our program included.” With that in mind, their program is specifically and intentionally designed to support the needs of system-affected youth and families. Their primary strategy is “offering free programming that includes no cost food, transportation, and accessibility adaptations.” Specifically, Friends for Change utilized Expanding Access grant funding to provide daily transportation as well as resources when there are gaps in human and social services, including non-perishable foods and funding for healing tools. In assessing the representation of underserved populations in their programs, Hailee Galandak-Cochran provided the following demographic percentages of program participants and/or families.
  - LGBTQIA+” 48%
  - BIPOC: 24%
  - Neurodivergent: 79%
  - New American: 6%
  - DCF involvement: 85%

<sup>2</sup> *“Youth Risk Behavior Survey.”* (2020). Vermont Department of Health.

<https://www.healthvermont.gov/stats/surveys/youth-risk-behavior-survey-yrb>

<sup>3</sup> Siaca Curry, J. *“Equity and Inclusion: An Action Agenda for Youth Development Professionals.”* (2017). National Institute on Out-of-School Time. <https://www.niost.org/Afterschool-Matters-Fall-2017/equity-and-inclusion-an-action-agenda-for-youth-development-professionals>

- Struggling with food insecurity: 76%
- Struggling with substance use: 79%
  
- City of Burlington Parks, Recreation, and Waterfront Department. Gary Rogers, Recreation Superintendent at The City of Burlington Parks, Recreation, and Waterfront Department, highlighted a number of strategies to ensure that underserved youth are well represented and supported in their programs, First, “our Summer Recreation & Nutrition Program is offered at three subsidized housing complexes and an athletic park in our most culturally diverse neighborhood.” The result of these locations was that over 80% of participants identify as BIPOC, with an overwhelming majority representing first generation immigrants. Next, five to ten program slots for their summer camps and programs were reserved for BIPOC youth participants. Rogers said, “this plan was, in part, made possible with the assistance of funding from our Vermont Afterschool grant.” Lastly, the department intentionally sought to hire a racially and culturally diverse summer staff. “In summer 2023, eight of our fourteen directors and counselors for the Summer Recreation & Nutrition Program identify as BIPOC. They also highlighted the participant to staff progression, saying “most of these high school and college age staff participated in the program as children and several lived or still live in the apartment complexes and neighborhoods where we offer these programs.”
  
- Audubon Vermont. Audubon Vermont worked in partnership with many local organizations who positively contributed to their afterschool and summer programs in a variety of ways. Education Program Manager Debbie Archer said that “collaboration with local schools, the Boys and Girls Club, Outright Vermont, the Birds of Vermont Museum, and the Green Mountain Audubon Society chapter helped make camp a success this year.” One way these partnerships directly helped Audubon Vermont accomplish their goals was in the recruitment and enrollment of more diverse participants. With the help of the Expanding Access grant funding, Audubon Vermont was committed to ensuring that underserved populations were well-represented in the mix of participants, specifically youth from the LGBTQIA+ and BIPOC communities, as well as youth with disabilities or special needs. “We were thrilled to have four children who had never attended an Audubon program before attend camp this summer after being recommended by a partner organization. We also had a student attend with a physical disability, for their first ever summer camp experience. Their mom let us know that after they came to Audubon on a field trip with their class during the school year, she wanted to give our camp program a try.” Audubon Vermont was also committed to increasing employment opportunities for BIPOC and LGBTQIA+ communities as well, and their partnerships helped them advertise and diversify their applicant pool.

**Social-Emotional Learning and Mental Health.** A 2022 article from the Wallace Foundation cites that “educators around the country are seeing an increasing need to

support young people who may be struggling with anxiety, depression, fear, trauma, food insecurity, or even homelessness.”<sup>4</sup> Another study reported that in Vermont, 38% of youth report that they felt difficulties were piling up so high that they could not overcome them sometimes or often in the past month and another 45.5% of high schoolers said that COVID has made their mental health worse.<sup>5</sup> The Wallace Foundation continues on to identify afterschool and summer learning programs as “unique opportunities to help young people develop their social and emotional skills, behaviors, and beliefs, which can help kids manage the challenges they face.”<sup>6</sup> Many of our subrecipients used their grant funding to address the social-emotional and mental health needs of their participants. Two of those programs were Camp Agape and the Milton Family Community Center.

- Camp Agape. Camp Agape is a program that serves children who have experienced the incarceration of a parent by offering a week of summer overnight residential camp free of charge. The program is specifically tailored to high-risk youth impacted by trauma, separation, and shame. In response to the needs of their participants, Camp Agape used grant funds to hire a mental health consultant “who spent time prior to camp making connections with camper families to ascertain strengths and strategies to support campers in having a successful camp experience.” The mental health consultant was also present during the camp session to proactively train and advise staff, as well as to support campers that required direct intervention. Executive Director, Beth Ann Maier credited the mental health consultant with reducing altercations, meltdowns and runaway attempts and said they plan to continue having a consultant going forward. “No matter what financial pressures we face in the future, the presence of a mental health consultant will continue to be part of the program. It has allowed us to be proactive in planning staffing and activities to anticipate and respond flexibly to campers’ needs.”
- Milton Family Community Center. Executive Director Nicole Sener highlighted evidence-based social-emotional learning as one of their primary goals for the use of the Expanding Access grant funds. “We will increase kid’s resilience through building community, improving physical and mental health, and increasing skills for self-regulation.” They sought to help participants grow new skills for coping during difficult times and proactively set healthy habits that can follow them later into life. This goal was the result of challenges observed in students during the school day and at home. “In schools, students have presented high levels of challenging behaviors that are our best indicator of increased social-emotional and mental health needs that are going unmet. We know from discussions with the Milton

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<sup>4</sup> “*Why Afterschool Programs Need Social and Emotional Learning Now.*” (2022). The Wallace Foundation. <https://wallacefoundation.org/resource/article/why-afterschool-programs-need-social-and-emotional-learning-now>

<sup>5</sup> Morehouse, H. (2021). “*Creating a VT Summer of Connection, Healing, and Learning.*” (2021).

<sup>6</sup> “*Vermont Youth Project Statewide Data Summary.*” (2021). Vermont Afterschool. <https://legislature.vermont.gov/Documents/2022/WorkGroups/House%20Human%20Services/COVID19%20Response/Childcare/W~Holly%20Morehouse~Vermont%20Youth%20Project%20Statewide%20Data%20Summary%202021~1-21-2021.pdf>

School District that increased stress at home and ongoing instability at school have taken a big toll on children's ability to regulate, and we have seen this play out in behaviors in our afterschool program. Trauma is a common experience for many of our students." A town-wide planning process identified an ongoing need for additional activities for youth and more positive and supportive spaces for them to spend time. In response, the Milton Family Community Center used Expanding Access grant funding to better train their staff to address these social-emotional and mental health needs. "Staff have completed a variety of trainings in social-emotional needs of children through the Devereux Center, as well as in trauma-informed care." They are also using funding to implement evidence-based social-emotional curriculums in their afterschool and summer programs. They are implementing this curriculum in partnership with the school district in order to "find something that further supports the work the schools are doing on this front." The program is already noticing positive results. In one specific example, "a child grappling with behavioral challenges linked to anxiety made substantial strides during the summer. Our teachers' empathetic approach, which included offering space when needed, providing coping strategies, and involving the child as a teach assistant in activities, resulted in remarkable improvements. He started to hide less and spend more time with the teachers. We introduced him children his age who shared similar interests such as drawing and clothing." Nicole Sener reflected that "these stories showcase the profound impact our afterschool and summer program has on children facing adversity. By providing a safe and nurturing environment, we empower them to overcome obstacles, build confidence, and develop crucial life skills."

- Essex Junction Recreation and Parks (EJRP). EJRP utilized their grant funding to address participant needs and behavior by hiring a dedicated Behavior Support Specialist. Responsibilities under this new role included identifying previous struggles and growth areas and proactively developing a plan for future programs. They met with school teams and families of students known to require additional support, sought input from site coordinators about support strategies, and adapted existing plans for the upcoming summer programs. The specialist translated the information and strategy research into staff training opportunities "designed to coach behavior management strategies, understanding of child development and the role that trauma plays in children's lives." They also created easily accessible binders with information about specific youth support and success plans including how to foster strong relationships and sample incentive plans for staff to implement. School Age Childcare Director, Maureen Gillard, noted the impact of this innovative work, saying, "we continued to see campers who no longer needed a specific plan to decrease throughout the summer. Part of this was due to the investment in staff training at the beginning of the school year and the supports we put in place that supported the success of ALL campers."



**Transportation and Accessibility.** The 2020 *America After 3PM* report found that 31% of Vermont parents said there is no safe way for their child to get to and from programs.<sup>7</sup> Understanding the need for adequate transportation, the Expanding Access grant application specifically asked applicants “how the transportation needs of the youth attending the programs will be met.” Many of our subrecipients echoed the need for transportation and developed solutions to address the challenge. Two of those programs were the Governor’s Institute of Vermont and the Sage Mountain Botanical Sanctuary.

- Governor’s Institute of Vermont (GIV). The Governor’s Institute of Vermont reported an overwhelming number of students requesting transportation assistance that outpaced their capacity to provide support. “Recognizing that we likely did not have the capacity to meet this year’s potential demand, we decided to lean into one of our core values: building community networks,” shared Tamira Martel, GIV’s Development Director. During the application process, GIV asked students if they anticipated needing transportation. This allowed them to better gauge the overall need for transportation assistance earlier on. “Once we had accepted and enrolled students, our Operations Manager selected from the database those students who indicated they needed transportation assistance and developed a contact list of other students in their geographic region who were attending the same Institute and did not require transportation.” GIV reached out to the latter group and asked if they would be willing to assist with student transportation needs. If they agreed, GIV connected the two parties and allowed them to work out the details. “Not only did this help dramatically reduce the number of students that our staff and board provided transportation for, but it also had the added benefit of connecting two students with similar interests from the same area, a core benefit of the GIV experience,” said Martel.
  
- Sage Mountain Botanical Sanctuary. Due to their rural setting, Sage Mountain Botanical Sanctuary cited transportation as a primary reason that most underserved youth in their project area are unable to participate in afterschool and summer programming. In response, they utilized Expanding Access grant funding to provide transportation and make their programming accessible to youth in their rural community. Executive Director Emily Ruff said, “our primary innovation was to provide transportation to youth to overcome the barrier of access. The Expanding Access grant provided the baseline of our budget and the funding subsidized transportation, which was a critical element to providing access to this program for the low-income families we serve.” The Sage Mountain Botanical Sanctuary was a new program and that created an additional 39 weeks of programming for their community, serving 39 unique participants from Washington and Orange Counties.

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<sup>7</sup> *“America After 3PM” (2020).*