

2024 Annual Report

Prepared for 2024 Annual
Meeting in review of 2023
Fiscal Year (10/1/22- 9/30/23)



Everyone deserves a home.

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Executive Director's Message

Dear COTS Community,

For anyone following local news, to say that there is a great deal of pressure on the Burlington community is not surprising. Also not surprising are the disproportionate effects of those external pressures on our most vulnerable populations. The team at COTS see these effects up close everyday in our shelters, in our outreach, and in our affordable housing. The need in our community has, perhaps, never felt more urgent, and the question that we get most often these days is, "What is COTS doing in response to the need?"

As you flip through these pages, the story that you will see is one of determination, of hard work and of hope for our future. The COTS Community, which includes you, stands with folks in need in our community. In addition to our long-standing flagship programs like the Daystation, Waystation, and Family Shelters, you will read about newer initiatives, like our Motel and Unsheltered Outreach Team and of our expansion of the Family Supportive Housing program. You will see a brand-new 16 unit apartment building opening for families who are experiencing homelessness, and you will learn about wrap-around services for families in the Family Shelter program. These pages will tell the tale of how the various parts of COTS work together on a singular goal of helping our guests achieve permanent, stable housing.

We are extremely proud of our work, and of the numbers of folks we have assisted on their journey to housing in the past year, and, while the numbers are important, there is a sub-text to the story. What does not show in the numbers are the tremendous number of partnerships and relationships within the community that make our work, and the work of so many others, successful.

At the surface, it's our staff who work with other agencies for security deposits and rental arrearages. It's the relationships to other housing providers and service providers who assist our guests longer term. But go deeper, and it is our property management partners, our IT folks, our DEIB partners, our accountants and auditors, our funders and supporters, Board and volunteers, and the list goes on and on. It's all of you who write the stories of success that fill these pages, and all of you who fuel the successful transformation of the lives of so many in our community!

Thank you!



Jonathan Farrell, COTS Executive Director



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Housing Services Director

Our Mission

We advocate for long-term solutions to end homelessness and provide emergency shelter, services, and long-term housing for people who are experiencing homelessness or are marginally housed.

We Believe

In the value and dignity of every human life.

That housing is a fundamental human right.

That emergency shelter is not the solution to homelessness.



Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, & Belonging

COTS believes in the value and dignity of every human life. Our dedication to Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging is not just an aspect of our mission and values, it is at the core of who we are. We strive to foster a safe, welcoming, and supportive space for all. To achieve this, we are committed to the following actions:

- We continuously collect and review feedback from those we serve and those we work with to ensure that we are living our values and treating everyone with dignity and respect.
- We acknowledge that members of the BIPOC and LGBTQIA+ communities are disproportionately impacted by homelessness. We actively work to ensure the services we offer and the support we provide are in alignment with the needs of these and other marginalized communities.
- We aim to recruit team members that reflect the diversity of our community and those we serve. Beyond recruitment, once an individual is part of our team, we focus on cultivating a culture that allows all members of Team COTS to bring their authentic selves to work.
- We invest the time and resources necessary to continually improve our understanding of diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging, through intentional education, celebration, and reflection on our current practices.

We must intentionally address all barriers to accessing housing, the inequities in our systems, and the evolving needs of our community. We know that we are not there yet, that the work never ends, and that we can always improve.

Strategic Partnership with nuwave

COTS is entering its 3rd year of partnership with nuwave Equity Corporation, a locally owned consulting firm, to strengthen Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging (DEIB) for all staff and guests. nuwave's mission is to "bring together various organizations leveraging different skill sets to create and develop systemic solutions to battle issues that are systemic in nature. We provide full turnkey, data driven Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging strategies that drive real impact."

Financial Report

COTS had a strong year of private fundraising, state and federal grant awards, and program revenue. Thanks to COTS's incredible community of supporters, we met major event fundraising goals, including for the COTS Walk and Phonathon.

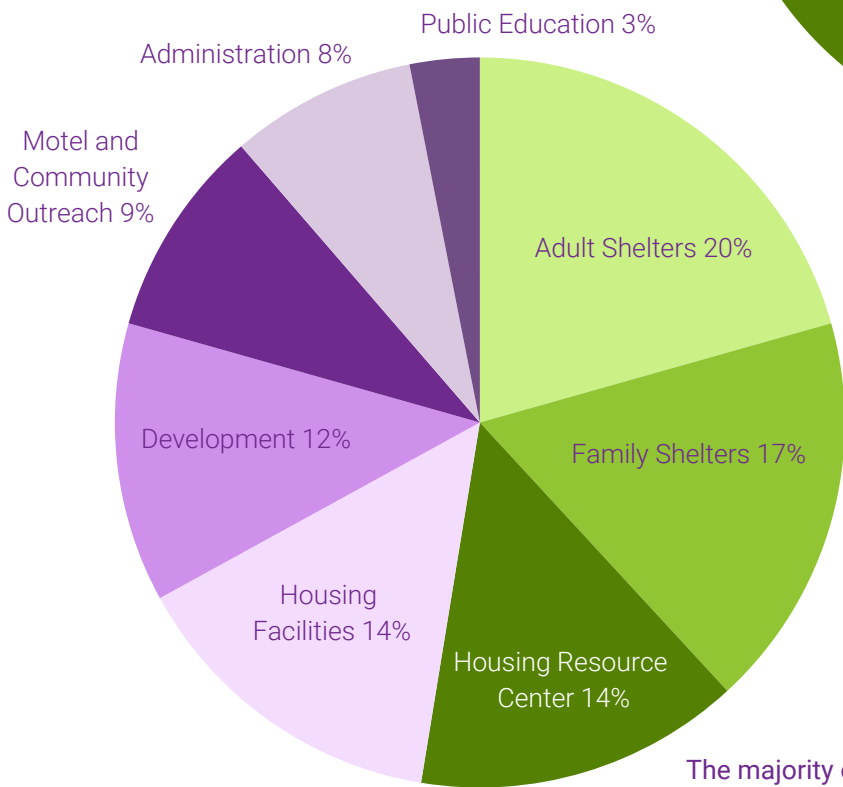
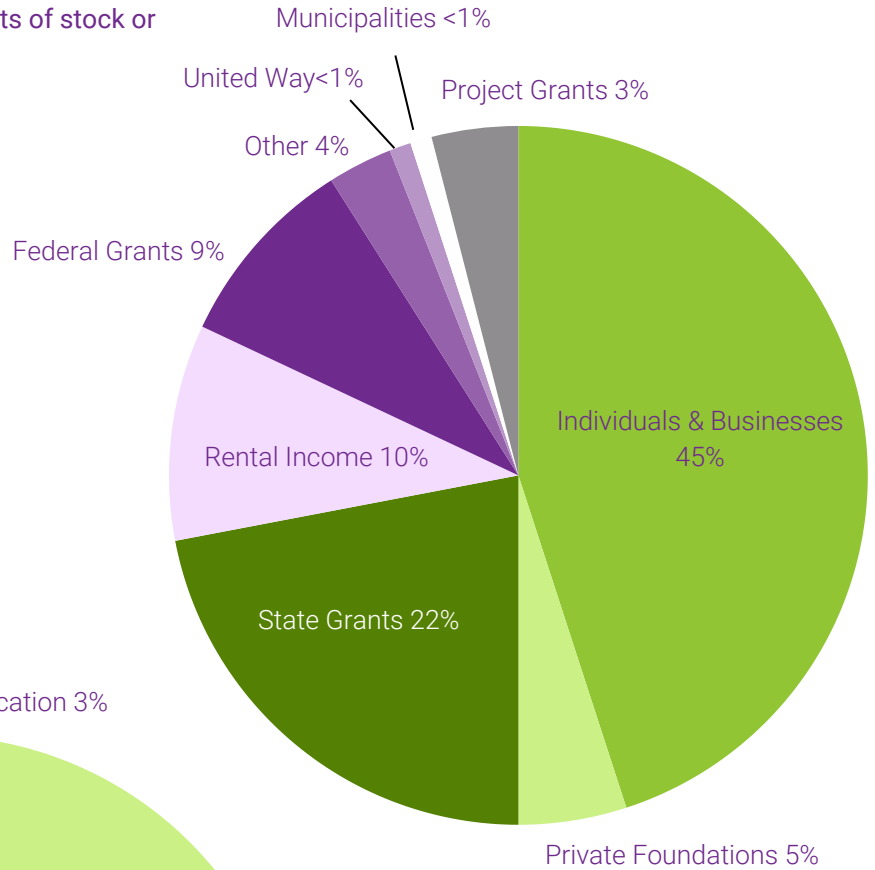
COTS Income and Revenues October 2022 - September 2023	
Total Federal Grants	\$364,637.37
Total General Public Support	\$ 2,065,365.17
Total Municipalities Revenue	\$ 52,739.26
Total Other Revenue	\$ 190,921.88
Total Program Revenue	\$ 59,056.88
Total Rental Income and Reimbursement	\$ 413,346.59
Total State Grants	\$ 901,584.21
Chittenden County UWay	36,924.74
Other United Way	989.55
Total United Way	\$ 37,914.29
Total Income	\$ 4,085,565.65

Though revenues were strong in FY23, expenses fell slightly beyond budget with a final deficit of -\$ 2,710.67. Client and programmatic needs continue to grow at a rapid pace while costs simultaneously rise. With prudent planning for the future, COTS maintains strong reserves to bridge this gap at the close of the fiscal year. Full audited financials and 990 reports are available on our website at www.cotsonline.org.

COTS Expenses and Net Income October 2022 - September 2023	
Meals	9,899.76
Overflow	2,041.64
Client Prevention	32,762.92
Housing Retention Svcs	3,363.00
Security Deposits	23,226.00
Total Prevention	\$ 59,351.92
Rapid Rehousing	5,825.07
Rent	3,479.00
Other Client Supports	44,624.18
Total Client Services	\$ 125,221.57
Total Operations	\$ 1,407,927.85
Total Personnel	\$ 2,555,126.90
Total Expenses	\$ 4,088,276.32
Net Operating Income	-\$ 2,710.67

Revenues

The majority of COTS's revenue comes directly from our community, which includes annual donations, event fundraising, business and corporate support, family foundations and trusts, bequests and planned gifts, and gifts of stock or other assets.



Expenses

The majority of COTS's expenses go directly to clients in the form of prevention assistance and shelter and outreach programs. A smaller portion supports fundraising, communications, and public education.



Everyone deserves a home.

OUR YEAR IN NUMBERS *

FAMILY SHELTER:

29 families, including **53 children**, stayed in a COTS family shelter and received housing and supportive services. Specialized programs were also offered for children.

THE WAYSTATION:

183 individuals stayed at the Waystation, COTS' year-round overnight shelter, and received housing and supportive services.

MOTEL OUTREACH TEAM:

212 adults and **87 children** experiencing homelessness in area hotels received re-housing and support services.

THE DAYSTATION:

515 individuals visited the Daystation, COTS' daytime drop-in center for lunch, showers, laundry, and services.

FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE:

49 households, including **51 children**, received financial assistance and services to avert homelessness.

RE-HOUSING SUPPORT:

67 households, including **42 children**, received re-housing assistance and services.

HOUSING NAVIGATION:

368 households, including **421 adults** and **193 children**, received housing and services through the COTS Housing Resource Center.

* COTS services provided during COTS Fiscal Year (10/1/22- 09/30/23)

MORE THAN SHELTER

COTS continues to adapt as new challenges arise in our community.

Learn more: cotsonline.org.

COTS is one of the largest service providers for people who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless in Vermont. We helped **1,024** people, including **257** children, last year.

AFFORDABLE HOUSING

We provide **114 units** of affordable transitional and permanent housing.



EMERGENCY SHELTER

We provide year-round day and overnight emergency shelter for individuals and families with children.



HOUSING SERVICES

Housing Navigators help guests find sustainable permanent housing, as well as access community resources and mainstream benefits.



PREVENTION OUTREACH

Housing Resource Specialists help individuals and families stabilize and avert the crisis of homelessness.



Across all COTS programs, **105 households** were placed in permanent housing.



Housing Services

COTS Housing Services programs include the Housing Resources Center, which provides housing navigation and prevention assistance, as well as our housing retention teams, which serve residents in COTS's permanent affordable housing buildings and our Family Supportive Housing program which serves families with children.

Message from Sophia Senning, Housing Services Director

In the 2023 fiscal year, we continued to see an increase in the level of need across all program and housing spaces. We are also feeling the aftermath of pandemic era supports, such as Vermont Emergency Rental Assistance. While we work to support all tenants in our permanent buildings, we do see some tenants who are not able to maintain housing.

In response, we are expanding our support for folks when they move into housing. We understand that the trauma of homelessness does not end when someone secures housing, and we are bolstering our retention and community enrichment supports for tenants after they move in.

A persistently low vacancy rate has made finding suitable housing for the households we work with a near impossible feat. Just five years ago, COTS could call upon our network of landlords and with enough time could locate housing for vulnerable folks. Currently, those landlords have sold, or those units are full and have long waitlists. COTS permanent housing buildings are also full, and all have long waitlists. While this is a positive (we are currently providing over 100 units of deeply affordable housing for people exiting homelessness), it does slow the movement of folks exiting shelter.

Fortunately, COTS continues to increase the availability of permanent affordable housing in our community by constructing 16 new units of family housing this year. Families moving in this spring will be welcomed to a safe, permanent home, complete with a few welcoming touches.

Furthermore, our Family Supportive Housing (FSH) program has recently grown to meet the needs of unhoused families in our community. FSH is now a statewide program, launched in 2013 by COTS. The program initially comprised a single team member, now consists of five team members, allowing us to help as many as 75 families at a time in the coming years. Several of the families moving into our new building are enrolled in FSH so will have additional support to ease their transition.

Provided financial assistance to 110 individuals in 49 households.

Rapidly re-housed 117 individuals in 67 households.

Provided long-term supportive case management for 31 households, including 63 children in FSH.

90% of families in FSH were permanently housed.

HRC Housing Navigators housed 43 households.



Did you know COTS operates 114 units of deeply affordable transitional and permanent housing?



From homelessness to housing, one step at a time...

At the time we met Nikkita, she was abusing substances, in an unhealthy relationship and had accrued over \$5,000 in back rent and damages to her apartment. After losing her housing, Nikkita bounced around in unstable situations but often visited the COTS Daystation. Over time, Nikkita worked on her sobriety and came to stay at the COTS Waystation. Despite her rental history, her housing navigator helped her move into a single room at the Wilson. For two years she paid her rent on time, maintained her sobriety, and kept in communication with COTS. Over the years she engaged with COTS retention workers to support next steps after the Wilson. Nikkita was eventually approved for a studio apartment at COTS 95 North Ave building. She still drops by the Daystation occasionally to encourage her peers to keep working toward their goals.



Smith House



The Wilson



St. John's Hall



95 North Ave



Canal Street



Main Street Family Housing

Emergency Shelter and Outreach

COTS operates emergency shelter for single adults and families. Altogether, COTS has capacity for 36 adults in overnight shelter and regularly serves around 60 adults daily at the Daystation. Additionally, COTS serves 15 families with children at two family shelter locations. In 2020 at the onset of the Pandemic, COTS launched the motel outreach team to serve households staying in emergency motel shelter. Today, that team also serves unsheltered guests at the Daystation.



Message from Tammy Santamore, Emergency Shelter and Outreach Director

Over the past fiscal year, we've been met with rising challenges including increased substance use and complex mental health needs of guests, which at times present safety issues for staff and other guests we serve. The limited availability of public safety officers to respond when there are current or imminent safety concerns has continued to be a challenge. In response, COTS regularly evaluates our safety practices and training as well as exploring how to enhance safety through modifications to our physical spaces.

Additionally, we have experienced an increasing number of guests whose medical needs exceed our capacity to care for them safely in our spaces, such as individuals who are unable to perform basic activities or maintain personal hygiene, ambulate or have other medical needs that are outside of our scope of the work and resources. This results in vulnerable adults not having appropriate shelter for their complex needs. Additionally, the stark lack of available and affordable housing extends shelter stays, even when guests are otherwise prepared to move into housing in the community.

Throughout the year, we have worked to streamline access to resources at the Daystation and engage our community partners in strengthening the system of care to better meet the needs of the guests we serve. Providers from various agencies provide education, support and regular outreach to guests including but not limited to Burlington Housing Authority, Pathways, Opportunities Credit Union, Turning Point Recovery Center, Dr Pepper/Keurig, Community Health Center of Burlington, Associates for Training and Development, Howard Center, Working Fields, and Department of Labor.

After struggling with staffing shortages for much of the previous year, we have fortunately recently filled several open positions to provide adequate staffing at our shelter locations.

Looking toward the future, we will continue to evaluate our existing onboarding, new employee, and new manager training plans to best meet the professional development needs of our team members allowing us to continue to meet the evolving needs of our guests.

27 households, including 57 children stayed at Family Shelter in FY23.

71% of those families were permanently housed during that time.

183 individuals stayed at the Waystation.

316 individuals were served at the Daystation, with a peak of over 80 visitors on a single day.

167 households were served by the COTS Motel Outreach Team.

42 households obtained permanent housing through navigation with the Motel Outreach Team.



Alan's Story

One of our guests at the Waystation, Alan, also goes to the Daystation everyday. He had been in and out of the shelter a couple of times due to substance use.

This year, Alan entered treatment with the support of the COTS team and partnership with Turning Point Center recovery coaches who visit the Daystation for recovery support. He completed treatment, and we held his bed at the Waystation, where he has remained sober for several months and working on a housing plan with his COTS housing navigator.

“ My friends ask why I don't stay with friends or get a motel room and I tell them it's because the Waystation is home to me and I know the staff care about me and I care about them as well. It keeps me from using which means I can now spend time with my young daughter again and I'm working on rebuilding relationships with other family members as well. ”



Main Street Family Shelter



Firehouse Family Shelter



Waystation Adult Overnight Shelter



Daystation Drop-in Shelter



THE DIFFERENCE A DOLLAR MAKES

\$24

*covers the cost
of an ID, which is
needed to apply for
housing*

\$100

*covers four nights of
emergency shelter at
the Waystation for
single adults*

\$365

*covers the average
cost of moving and
storage*

\$535

*covers the average
utility assistance
payment*

\$1,912

*is the average financial
assist needed to help
households avoid
eviction*



Everyone deserves a home.

Get Involved

More than half of COTS's annual budget comes from generous donations from our community. Our programs and major events are made possible by the kindness of hundreds of volunteers each year. There are many ways you can support our mission from volunteering, donating, and advocating in our community. Contact Rebekah Mott at rebekahm@cotsonline.org to learn more about how you can support COTS. We are grateful.



Ways to give:



Donate online at www.cotsonline.org/donate, or by mail to COTS at PO Box 1616, Burlington, VT 05402.



Transfer appreciated stocks or bonds as a gift. Under the right circumstances, you can deduct their full fair market value and avoid incurring capital gains tax. Talk to your financial advisor about the amount and timing of your gift, and give them the following information for transferring the security.

Send electronic certificates to:
Charles Schwab and Company, Inc.
FBO Committee on Temporary Shelter
Account # 6163-8032
DTC # 0164, code 40
Tax ID # 03-0285606



Consider COTS in your legacy planning, including:

- IRA Qualified Charitable Contributions
- Bequests and Wills
- Beneficiary Designations



Check out COTS's in-kind donation wishlist at www.cotsonline.org/wishlist.



Volunteering at COTS:

You can volunteer at COTS in many ways, and we appreciate all types of skills and areas of expertise. COTS volunteer needs are constantly changing, so if you'd like to stay up-to-date on our volunteer opportunities, we encourage you to fill out our brief volunteer application to keep you on our volunteer list at www.cotsonline.org/volunteer. Please contact Romy at romyt@cotsonline.org with questions!

Current opportunities:

- Daystation lunch - prepare and serve lunch at the Daystation.
- After school mentor at family shelter.
- Respite provider at family shelter - give parents a break by doing an activity with children in the shelter space.

COTS Events:

COTS events run on volunteer power. Our events help us raise money for our programs and services, educate the community about our work, and give back directly to those in need. We could not hold these important events without our generous volunteers.

COTS Walk on May 5th, 2024

Participants harness the power of community by raising money as teams or individuals. Join us for this family-friendly event and take a 3.6 mile walk through Burlington to learn more about COTS services.

Back to School Bonanza on August 3rd, 2024

Through business sponsorships and donations, we gather school supplies, first-day outfits, free haircuts, fun activities and snacks and hand everything out to kids in our community who need a boost to get ready to head back to school.

COTS Phonathon from December 2nd-5th, 2024

Join dozens of volunteers as we call past supporters to thank them and ask for their continued support to fund our programs and services.