

COTS Welcomes 16 Families Home to Main Street Family Housing

This spring, 16 families, which include about 30 children, will move into COTS's newly constructed Main Street Family Housing building. Families will move there from COTS Family Shelter, the emergency motel program, or other shelters in our community.

In partnership with nonprofit affordable housing developer Evernorth, the new multifamily apartment building specifically for families who have experienced homelessness was constructed this year on existing COTS property, adjoining the Main Street Family Shelter. This building will provide families with permanent, service-enriched housing as well as continued access to COTS support services, including connections to affordable childcare opportunities, referrals to medical and mental health supports if needed, assistance setting personal and financial goals, as well as a range of housing retention

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COTS Strengthens Commitment to Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging

COTS continues to partner 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."

Through multiple listening sessions with COTS staff and board, employee surveys, and senior leadership working sessions, COTS worked with nuwave to craft a DEIB statement that voices COTS's commitment to specific action steps aimed at creating a welcoming environment for all.

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:

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services. The downtown location will help residents maintain easy access to a wide array of amenities and transportation options.

COTS Executive Director Jonathan Farrell said, "This project will have a cascading benefit for the children who live there. It will help to alleviate the many social, emotional, and economic tolls homelessness takes by creating a new opportunity for families to thrive in their community."

The building was made possible by funding provided by generous donations from New England Federal Credit Union, the Hoehl Family Foundation, the Pomerleau Family Foundation, COTS Board members, and several anonymous donors. Federal Low Income Tax Credit Equity administered by Vermont Housing Finance Agency, Congressionally Directed Spending thanks to Senator Peter Welch, Federal ARPA funds administered by Vermont Housing & Conservation Board, and HOME Funds administered by the City of Burlington also provided critical funding to the project.

"We are deeply grateful to our generous donors and funding partners who contributed to make this dream a reality,"

Jonathan said. "We appreciate the efforts of our construction team at J.A. Morrissey who battled supply chain issues, labor shortages, and other set-backs but still managed to complete this project on time and on budget."

COTS began planning for the project in 2019 after forecasting a rise in children and family homelessness and seeing a dearth of affordable units suitable for families in the community. The COVID-19 Pandemic forced a delay in planning as COTS pivoted to respond to the emergency. Fortunately, the building is now coming online at a pivotal time for families experiencing homelessness as numbers of unhoused children are on the rise. According to Chittenden County Homeless Alliance and Vermont Coalition to End Homelessness, "the number of persons experiencing homelessness and in a household with children increased by 36% compared to the prior year."

While the need in our community is greater than what the Main Street Family Housing units can provide, COTS is proud to offer a safe, dignified, deeply affordable home to 16 families this spring.



A Community Hub at the COTS Daystation

On any given day at the COTS Daystation, visitors will find a clean, open, quiet, calm space where they can come in out of the elements. Guests can wash and dry laundry, eat a nutritious hot meal, utilize computers and phones, pick up mail, and meet with service providers. Guests who work overnight have a room to sleep in. The regular presence of other local nonprofits and community organizations help Daystation guests make connections that help them address personal challenges.



According to Emergency Shelter Director Tammy Santamore, “We have worked to streamline access to resources and engage our community partners in strengthening the system of care to better meet the needs of the guests we serve.”

The schedule of partners each week includes Burlington Housing Authority, Vermont Department of Labor, Turning Point Center, Working Fields, Community Health Centers of Burlington, UVM Nursing Program, Pathways, Vermont Associates for Training and Development, Opportunities Credit Union, and others. Several local employers have hosted job fairs, conducted on the spot interviews, and hired guests. Each day, volunteers bring and serve a warm meal to guests, sometimes up to 80 people.

The Daystation is essential for people like John, a 43 year old man who has lived in Vermont his whole life: “I am a professional welder. I have been welding for 20 years. I was working and making \$26 an hour but I made the biggest mistake of my life after I got injured. I got addicted to pain pills. It was hard but I quit it. Except while I was at work, I had a withdrawal seizure and lost my job as a result. I’ve been homeless before – this isn’t my first rodeo. But when I come here, I know I’ll survive. I’m sleeping outside right now and it really helps to have a place to come inside. The food is always really good here. I’ll get back on my feet. I’ve picked up a night shift so that I can sleep here in the bunk room during the day and that makes a really big difference so I’m not going from work to sleeping outside during the day.”

For people like John, the Daystation is a haven. It can be the first step towards permanent housing.

In the three-month period between October to December 2023, 592 unique visitors came to the Daystation.

Volunteer to serve lunch at the Daystation at cotsonline.org/volunteer or email Romy at romyt@cotsonline.org.

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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.



Emiliano Void Founder of nuwave

It Takes a Village

SEASON OF GIVING

Our October Boot Drive was a huge success, and we want to thank everyone who helped keep people warm and safe during our cold months. Thank you, **Alan and Ann Charron; Andy McClellan and Alice Brown; Anne Crowley and Alan Lampson; Barbara S. Holzel; Barbara Saylor Rodgers and Robert Rodgers; Jane W. Hakins; Joerg Klauck and Ann Gibbons; Josephine Corcoran; Karen and Michael Patno; Kathryn Fortunato; Katie and Lou Natale; Lila Richardson and Allen Gilbert; Marianthe and Colin Leach; Mary O'Brien and Dennis Sanders; Patricia Crowley; Patricia MacCubbin and Ernest Prentice; Paul Demers and JoAnne Heidkamp; Paula Pickering; Sally Myser Wadhams; Susan Littlefield; Wanda and John Wilking** for donating adult winter boots.

Thank you, **Full Moon Farm**, for donating pumpkins for our Daystation carving contest!



We would like to thank **The Farmhouse Group** for donating delicious holiday meals for our Daystation guests to enjoy in November and December.

City Market hosted its 26th Annual Tree Sale for COTS in December, selling hundreds of trees from **Moffatt's Tree Farm** in Craftsbury. Thank you to City Market volunteers and staff who made this successful event possible! This event resulted in a \$16,685 donation to support services. **The Intervale Center** also planted a tree for every tree sold. Since 1998, City Market has raised over \$240,000 for us through this sale, and we are so grateful!



Montstream Studios provided cards of a beautiful winter moonset scene for us to send to supporters during the holidays.

Thank you, **Pomerleau Family** and the **City of Burlington** for inviting our family shelter families and children to the Pomerleau Family Holiday Party.

The Mountain Mamas brought delicious baked cookies for guests to enjoy.

Thank you, **Love and Blessings** for hosting their annual Daystation holiday party where they provided our adult guests with wrapped gifts and a prime rib meal.

Every child that we serve at COTS was provided holiday gifts thanks to our generous community! Many of you dropped off gift cards and gifts, ordered gifts online, and ran donation drives.

Thank you, **Erica Cox; Emily May; Jason Yereb; Johan McConnell; Laura and Paul Camp; Liz Dyer and Jason Kolesnik; Oh My Dog VT; Rebecca and Dominick Poquette; Ronald and Agnes Regan; St. John Vianney Church; Susan Levy; Susan Wholey and Paul Reese; United Church of Colchester; Women's Leadership Group** for donating toys, games, gift cards, and craft supplies for children in COTS shelter and services.

Thank you, **Vermont Business Magazine**, for donating ad space to us again this year!

Emily Raymond created 100 Valentines for guests at the Daystation.

Green Mountain Chorus delivered Singing Valentines, with proceeds benefiting COTS.



COTS EVENTS

We are so lucky to have such a wonderful community who helped us exceed our **COTS Phonathon** goal. Thank you for putting up yard signs, answering the call, spreading the word on socials, and of course, donating to end homelessness in Vermont! **Thank you, COTS volunteers, staff, board members, and longtime partners** for making these calls. With your help, **we surpassed our goal of \$250,000**. Thank you, **Leonardo's Pizza**, for providing our callers with the perfect meal.



New England Federal Credit Union and a **private donor** provided a generous Challenge Grant for the Phonathon. **WOKO-FM** and **McKenzie Country Classics** partnered with us on the radio to help share success stories and encourage listeners to call in their pledges.

Thank you for gathering with us on National Homeless Persons' Memorial Day for the **COTS Candlelight Vigil**. We honored those who have died while homeless or are currently experiencing homelessness through touching vignettes and candle lighting. Thank you to **our wonderful longtime friends and supporters** for reading at this event. Thank you **Sugarsnap** for donating delicious cookies, **Starbucks** for gifting us hot cocoa and coffee, and **Top Hat Entertainment** for providing sound.

DONATIONS, DRIVES, & COTS WISH LIST

Burton Snowboards donated 400 articles of clothing for guests to stay cozy.

Thank you, **Fourbital Factory** for donating 900 high quality beanies.

Gadue's Dry Cleaning partnered with COTS to dry clean winter coats from multiple drives this winter. Special shout out to Penny!

Thank you **Hanes for Good** for providing hundreds of socks.

The New England Patriots donated 100 Empowerment sleeping bag coats for our Daystation guests.

Turtle Fur Company donated fleece hats, accessories, and blankets.

Thank you, **Bombas** for your ongoing donation of socks.

Thank you, **Vermont Soap** for donating 120 bars of shea butter soap.

Special thanks to those who donated from our wish list or set up donation drives. Thank you, **800response; Andrew and Leslie Griffiths; Ann and Leighton Laughlin; Anna Romagnoli; Barbara Sirvis; Betty and Marvin Libson; Betzy Vensel-Nichols; Darlene Zeno; Elizabeth Hazen; Ida Pucino; Ilke Van Genechten; Ivana Meservy; Jaun Moscoso; Jennie Sloan; Jennifer Conetta and Thomas McCann; Karen Lebiecki and Richard Parent; Kathy and Jerry Wood; Kelly Lathrop; Kendal Coldren; Kira and Stephen Guidice; Lauren Prinzing; Lee Nelson; Lisa Swartz; Love and Blessings; Marianne and Colin Leach; Mater Christi School; Monique Girard and Michel Lajeunesse; Naomi King; Orange Theory Fitness; Paige and Peter Ruffner; Patricia Bosley; Patricia Crowley; Rama Kocherlakota; Sam and Lee Hemingway; Sarah Strouse; Sheri McKenna; Susan and David Gay; Tonia and Gary Karnedy; UVM Student Occupational Therapy Association; Vincent Koehler; and so many more** for donating hygiene products, comfort items, gift cards, and other helpful items.



JPMorgan Chase & Co. employees made and donated 30 'Welcome Home Baskets' through **Break A Difference**.

Thank you, **Flynn Center for the Performing Arts** for donating 2 tickets to our staff appreciation event.

DAYSTATION LUNCH

Thank you, **Costco** for supporting our Daystation lunch program with gift cards!

Coffee Quality Laboratory has made many donations of whole bean coffee.

Thank you to these wonderful groups and individuals for donating food and meals to our Daystation. It is no easy feat to feed 50-100 people, and we appreciate every single one of you. Thank you, **Bouyea Fassett Bakery Inc;** **Charles Smith;** **Chelsea Frehulfer;** **Crowe LLP;** **Frank Ittleman, M.D.** and **Elaine Ittleman;** **Goodwater Brewery;** **Hallam-ICS;** **Hannaford Bros. Co.;** **IBM;** **Maggie Hannah;** **Homeschoolers of Chittenden County;** **Marie Anestopoulos;** **Market 32;** **Saint Michael's College – MOVE Office;** **Sherpa Foods, LLC;** **St Francis Xavier Parish;** **St. James Episcopal Church;** **The Devine-Ahl Family;** **The Mountain Mamas;** **Traci Collins;** **Vermont Community Foundation;** and more.

Many of these supporters have donated lunches multiple times!

Thank you, **Mirabelles Bakery**, for donating birthday cakes for children celebrating their birthdays while staying at Family Shelter. The cake mentioned in our Q&A with Evie, is from Mirabelles!



Q & A with Evie, Family Shelter Staff

Evie has worked with COTS at Family Shelter since October of 2021.

Romy: "What do you like most about working at shelter?"

Evie: "Every day is different. Given we have up to 15 families at any given time in the shelter, we are meeting people where they are at daily. Sometimes it is kids birthdays. I say that because today we had a baby born, and it is also one of our four year old's birthday. We get cake donated from a local bakery so I went and picked them up."

Romy: "What is something you would like to share about the work you do?"

Evie: "I get to work with both adults and children and support them in their living spaces. I get to smell very well cooked meals that smell delicious. I get to see kids off to school and return home from school. I get to check in with parents and have a good laugh when they need it."

Romy: "How does family shelter feel?"

Evie: "I like to think of the people here as not only my acquaintances and our guests but people I enjoy interacting with regularly. Although it is a shelter, the way it feels when I am here Monday through Friday is like a home."

Romy: "Having that in mind, what is a challenge you face?"

Evie: "Although it is exciting when people get permanent housing and can move out, it is bittersweet because we have made such great connections with each other. We have made connections amongst families, connections amongst families and staff, and we are going to miss the families and their children. We will also miss what we shared in the communal space, and what they brought to the communal space, and the positive impacts they brought with them."

Romy: "What is something impactful to you?"

Evie: "Families can stay here anywhere between 6-9 months, and that's such a small snippet of a lifetime, but we get to see mothers have babies, we get to see kids graduate grade levels, we get to see families experience the holidays together, we get to see folks move into a healthier environment separating from unhealthy relationships and patterns of behavior. Amongst all these wonderful happenings of life we do see barriers."

Romy: "What are some of those barriers?"

Evie: "Barriers we see are a lack of vital documents for housing case management, mental and physical health needing to be the first priority, transportation barriers, barriers to income/employment, and most frequently systemic barriers that make it increasingly difficult to navigate the systems and get out of houselessness."



Breaking Cycles, Strengthening Families

For children, losing one's home is a devastating and traumatic experience. Oftentimes, it means leaving behind pets, friends, and neighbors, giving away belongings, and creating an unstable and unpredictable environment. COTS Family Shelter program not only provides a warm, safe physical space, it creates a team of support around every child.

In 2023, COTS created the Children's Community Mental Health Liaison (CMHL) position to provide robust on-site mental health support for children and their parents. This position works in tandem with COTS's Children's Education Advocate and Family Housing Navigator.

North Wagner, LMSW has been in the CMHL position since early 2023. According to North, "We have a lot of parents here who self-identify as being part of a cycle and want to break it, but they may not have the support or resources they need, so we're able to identify it and maybe connect them to other services that can provide long-term support."

During this past fiscal year, North provided 138 one-on-one meetings with children and their parents. Through these activities, we were able to observe and evaluate social and emotional growth, social connections, and a deeper understanding of child development in our guests.

Guest connections and care:

- Drop-in "Parent Peer Support" groups are now offered weekly at both shelters. This is a designated time and space for parents to receive support from other parents while a mental health professional provides facilitation. In the case that no other parents drop in, this time can be used for a parent to receive support and validation from a mental health professional one-on-one.
- Creative group activities such as painting, tie-dye, beadwork, and other crafts are offered after school and upon request for families and youth. Times can be reserved for families requesting respite or, without guests scheduled, the playroom becomes a drop-in space for non-directive play

therapy (usually 4-5 pm Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, Friday). Scheduled and recurring non-directive play therapy for individual youth is often accompanied by social and emotional learning activities (identifying emotions, using coping skills to regulate emotions, etc.).

- Self-regulation toolkits ("Calm Kits") are now available for children and teenagers to create during therapy sessions. North supports youth to explore what helps calm them in moments of distress. Youth are able to select from a variety of items to build a kit that is unique to them. Items available can provide sensory input, a mindful moment, or a way to express feelings. They go through the items together and practice how each item can be used to regulate emotions.

Join our team!

Are you or someone you know looking to serve the community full or part-time with COTS? We are hiring! Please visit cotsonline.org/careers to view open positions. All positions start at least \$19/hr.

To apply, send your résumé and cover letter to jobs@cotsonline.org and state the position to which you are applying.

Benefits include:

- Vacation time, PTO, and sick time
- Paid holidays
- Health Insurance
- Vision & Dental Insurance
- Retirement Plan with employer match
- Contributions to an FSA or HSA
- Basic Life Insurance and AD&D
- Short-term disability
- Employee Assistance Program
- Wellness Benefits
- COSTCO membership
- Headspace Mindfulness & Meditation App membership



Everyone deserves a home.





COTS

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Register Now for the 35th Annual COTS Walk

On May 5th, 2024, COTS will hold the 35th annual COTS Walk. The Walk is one of our oldest and biggest peer-to-peer fundraisers and is a great way for people to feel more connected to COTS's work through physically walking the route that a person experiencing homelessness may walk to access services. The Walk is a family-friendly event with music, fun snacks, and activities for kids in the park.



Our theme this year is "I stand for COTS." Last year, COTS announced that it will no longer use the name, "Committee on Temporary Shelter," and that begged the question, "what does COTS stand for?" COTS stands for dignity for all, housing for all, and a belief in second chances. Now we are asking our community to join us at the COTS Walk to say, "I stand for COTS." The Walk is an opportunity to stand up for your values and physically embody COTS's belief that everyone deserves a home.

The COTS Walk is a critical annual fundraiser for us – the majority of our budget comes from private donations, including gifts generated through this event.

Our COTS Walk goal is to raise \$210,000 through peer-to-peer fundraising.

The COTS Walk has two purposes:

To raise public awareness about homelessness in our community and to raise money to support COTS shelters and services for Vermonters who are homeless or are at risk of losing their homes.

To register as a team or as an individual, or to fill out an application to volunteer, please visit our website at cotsonline.org/cots-walk

Music provided by:

Dixie Six, Jenni Johnson & the Jazz Junketeers, Joe Cribari, Sambatucada, Star 92.9, Red Hot Juba and 95 Triple X (confirmed as of publication)
