

Investing in Dignity and Hope Join the Campaign for a New Waystation

For more than 40 years, COTS has provided overnight shelter to adults at the Waystation program. With 36 beds and enrollment in COTS Housing Navigation services to support people with a housing plan as they address barriers and challenges, the Waystation shelter has been a lifeline for thousands of people over the past four decades.

COTS's adult overnight shelter is typically full and in an aging building with limitations due to the physical footprint, yet COTS had limited options to expand based on the cost and timeline to build a new facility or acquire new property.

However, a glimmer of hope sparked this summer when the COTS senior leadership team became aware that a federally owned property had been identified as a surplus property through the Government Services Agency Asset Disposition program. This program allows for the transfer of property to eligible agencies to serve the homeless population. The building, located at 58 Pearl Street, formerly served as the Social Security Administration offices, but has been vacant for four years.



Above: a rendering of the future common space design. Below: a rendering of a bedroom layout.

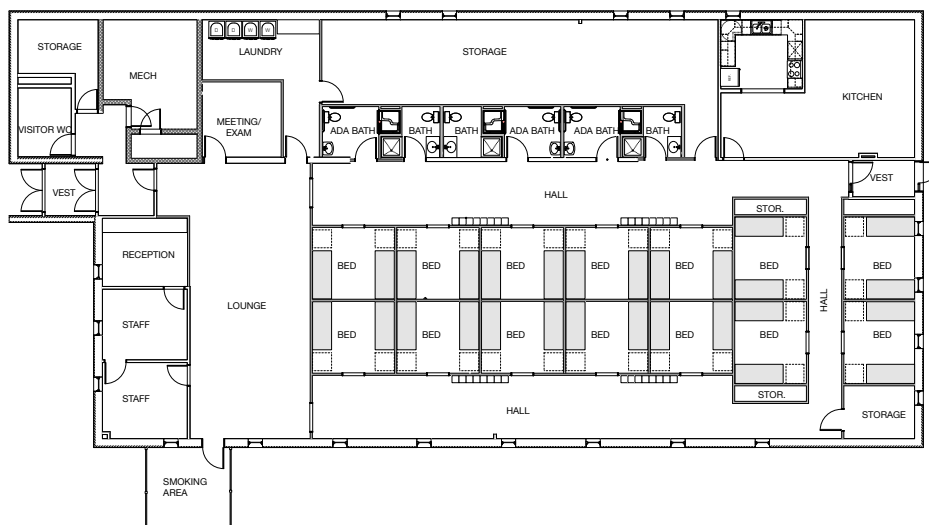
Upon learning of this opportunity, COTS formed a plan to meet both the urgent immediate needs in our community, as well as plan for the future of our flagship adult shelter program. Within days of acquiring the building, COTS opened a Winter Warming Station to add capacity throughout the cold winter months to prevent unsheltered people from freezing outside.

Starting on May 1, 2025, COTS plans to undergo extensive renovations to create an enhanced version of the Waystation program, expanding



capacity and greatly improving the program space through trauma-informed design and a less congregate model. This plan would allow COTS to move from a cramped space with dozens of bunk beds split between two gendered "dormitories," to a flexible configuration of private or semi-private rooms that can be quickly adapted to meet the needs of our guests.

COTS has long identified the need for a new space to bring our flagship program up to our trauma-informed standard of practice for our guests. The 7,361 square foot building is nearly four times the footprint of our existing Waystation shelter, allowing us to **expand year-round shelter capacity by 55 percent**. The building is one floor, with fully ADA accessible entrances, a private parking area, and in close proximity to services, including



HOMEFRONT is published twice a year, in March and November, by:



Everyone deserves a home.

PO Box 1616, Burlington, VT 05402
802-864-7402
fax 802-864-2612
www.cotsonline.org
Established 1982

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Kurt Reichelt, *Chair*
Lynne Jaunich, *Vice Chair*
Carol Boardman, *Secretary*
Andrew Hanson, *Treasurer*
Jared Anello
Kevin Baker
Sean Collins
Catherine Davis
Maree Gaetani
Peg Gagne
Steve Goldman
Tim Kane
Michael Lipson
Julia Paradiso
Sarah W. Sprayregen
Tom Stretton

Jonathan Farrell, *Executive Director*

HOMEFRONT

EDITOR

Rebekah Mott

WRITERS/PHOTOGRAPHERS

Romy Theisen

DESIGNER

liquid studio

FOLLOW US ONLINE

www.cotsonline.org

facebook.com/COTSONline

linkedin.com/company/cotsvt

@COTSvt

A United Way Funded Agency



New Waystation continued from page 1
the COTS Daystation shelter, the Vermont Department of Labor, and public transportation.

At the time of publication, COTS has raised about half of the funds necessary for the renovations, and needs about \$1 million more to complete the project on a tight timeline. The goal of this fundraising campaign is to transform 58 Pearl Street into a modern, dignified shelter program with an anticipated opening in December 2025.

Partnering with Duncan Wisniewski Architecture and JA Morrissey Construction, plans for the new space include:

- warming kitchen to improve food access
- 14 bedrooms with capacity for up to 4 people each
- 6 single use bathrooms with showers
- on-site laundry
- staff office and break space
- lounge/common space
- private meeting/medical exam room
- ample storage
- secure reception area

This redesign will enrich and enhance the Waystation program, eliminating large congregate bunk rooms, and providing the opportunity for additional privacy for guests with medical equipment or other safety needs. The interior will be designed and appointed using our latest understanding of trauma-informed design and help to **create a safe and stabilizing environment for up to 56 guests.**

Furthermore, in 2026, COTS plans to renovate the former Waystation shelter space located on lower Church Street into additional permanently affordable housing for people exiting homelessness. **This will add units to our adjacent housing property at the historic Wilson Hotel** and provide a much-needed resource for guests ready to leave shelter and move on to permanent housing.

The site is significantly closer (0.5 miles) to our 95 North Ave main offices and the Daystation drop-in center, making it easier for guests to access daytime programming and housing navigation services. All guests at the Waystation program engage in COTS Housing

Recent Point in Time Counts in Chittenden County

541 households in 2022

553 households in 2023

584 households in 2024

Navigation services, which means it is not just a warm, safe place to rest, but a pivotal steppingstone on our guests' path toward stability and sustainable living in the community. COTS is a housing-focused organization, and while we believe shelter is not the solution to homelessness, the COTS Waystation is an essential service that helps the most vulnerable adults in our community address their barriers to permanent housing.

Meeting the Moment

Even the most limited accounting of the homeless population in Chittenden County is heading in the wrong direction. The single night Point in Time Count only counts individuals and families who are staying in emergency shelter, staying in a motel with a voucher from General Assistance, or interviewed by street teams in communities that perform an in-person canvas on that night. Couch surfing, undisclosed rough sleeping, self-pay motel rooms, doubling up, and other precarious and dangerous conditions are not included.

COTS shelter spaces have been full consistently throughout the past year. As new rules and procedures for State-funded motel rooms have taken effect, many adults have fallen outside the priority categories for assistance, leaving hundreds of people with no place to go.

Our daytime adult program, the Daystation, has seen a tremendous increase in activity and utilization. In COTS' 2023 fiscal year, we had 515 unique visitors to the program. In the recently completed 2024 fiscal year, we had **nearly 1,800 unique visitors, an increase of 286%.** Nearly 75% of daily guests report sleeping outside, in a car, or another form of unsheltered experience.

This is a moment in which COTS and our community can take a stand for safety, dignity, and compassion. We believe deeply that the proposed 58 Pearl Street project embodies our core values and belief that "everyone deserves a home."

Do you want to be part of the solution to homelessness in our community? Join the Campaign for a New Waystation today! Contact Rebekah Mott, Director of Development & Communications at 802-383-8778 or rebekahm@cotsonline.org.

COTS Steps Up to Create Winter Warming Station for Unsheltered Neighbors

This winter and early spring, COTS provided additional overnight, low-barrier shelter with capacity for around 30 people. This added shelter capacity, made possible by COTS's successful acquisition of a former federally owned building, functions jointly with the COTS Daystation shelter to provide respite and services for unsheltered individuals.

While not mandatory, guests have access to services at the Daystation where community partners visit each week to provide a range of resources including mental health, substance treatment, job training and development, and more.

According to the 2024 Point in Time Count, there were **811 unshoused individuals** in Chittenden County. **259 people, or nearly 32% were homeless for 12 or more months**, a dramatic increase over the usual rate of chronic homelessness. With significant rates of **physical disability (19%)**, **persistent mental health challenges (32%)**, and **chronic health conditions (22%)**, unshoused individuals are in serious need of a full range of adaptive services and wrap-around care. Without significant support, they may struggle with moving beyond shelter.

According to COTS Executive Director, Jonathan Farrell, "the biggest lesson in operating the low barrier Warming Station is that just about every guest we are serving there would greatly benefit from a 24/7 residential care setting in which not only their basic needs would be met, but their acute combination of physical and mental health care needs, coupled with the need for substance abuse disorder treatment could be provided."

COTS continues to advocate for a greater investment in mental health treatment, medical services, and substance treatment resources in our community.

Because COTS offers a range of services and programs, in the first two months of operation, eight Winter Warming Station guests have moved from the short-term, low-barrier shelter into one of COTS's longer-term, housing-focused shelters. This not only creates openings for more low-barrier guests to sleep at the Warming Station but sets the guests who have moved to other COTS shelters on a path toward housing and stability.



Q & A with our Winter Warming Station Coordinator

What drew you to this position at the Warming Station?

What drew me to this position was a deep, personal connection to the mission. Years ago, I experienced both homelessness and domestic violence, and I know firsthand how difficult it can be to rebuild your life when you are facing unimaginable challenges. This work allows me to give back to the very community that once helped me — and in doing so, I have discovered that giving is reciprocal. While I show up to serve others, I often find that I am the one who is receiving — whether it is through a heartfelt conversation, a smile, or simply witnessing the strength and resilience of our guests.

What have you learned through this experience?

I have learned that every person who walks through our doors has a story. No one ever plans to become homeless — it can happen to anyone. What stands out the most is how much kindness, humor, and hope people still carry, even in the midst of hardship. I have learned that offering compassion and respect can be just as powerful as providing a warm place to sleep. It is a reminder that we are not just housing people or handing out blankets — we are reminding people of their dignity and worth.

What would you like the community to know about the people we serve at the warming shelter?

I want the community to know that homelessness is not a defining label — it is just a comma in someone's life, not a period. The people we serve are neighbors, parents, veterans, artists, and dreamers. They are people who have faced circumstances beyond their control — whether it is the loss of a job, an unexpected health crisis, or fleeing an unsafe situation.

It truly takes a village to help someone find stability again. Every act of kindness, every donation, and every hour of service helps to rewrite someone's story. When we show up for our most vulnerable neighbors, we are not just offering shelter — we are offering hope. I encourage the community to continue supporting COTS, not out of pity, but out of the belief that every person is worthy of dignity, compassion, and a second chance.

It Takes a Village

SEASON OF GIVING

We were able to outfit 100 of our Daystation guests with boots this winter season because of your help. We want to thank you very much for keeping people warm and safe during our cold months. Thank you, **Al and Ann Charron; Amalgamated Culture Works; Anne Crowley and Alan Lampson; Carol and Scott Boardman; Carole and Jay Furr; Constance and Paul Beliveau; Corey and Dana Mallon; Deborah Waldman; Denis and Susyn Dees; Duncan and Lorri Love; Elizabeth; Emily Bullis; Francine and Michael Mellott; Jennifer Pizzagalli; Jessica Story; Joanie and Michael; Jody and Richard Tritt; Jonathan Helland; Kate and Konrad Kruesi; Kevin and Dianne Arthur; Lee Nelson; Love & Blessings; May and Jason Burns; Molly Marceline; Paige and Peter Ruffner; Pamela C.; Patricia Bosley; Paul and Barb Macuga; Rachel and Nick Stanton; Rebecca and Larry Desrocher; Rick and Eugenia Saganich; Susan Littlefield; The Donlon Family; Thomas Derenthal and Kathryn Debari; Timothy and Jeanne Keefe; Timothy Palmer; Tonya Howard; Vincent Koehler; William and Lisa Northup; Zail Berry** for donating adult winter boots.

A huge thank you to **The Farmhouse Group** for donating delicious holiday meals for our Daystation guests in November and December.

Montstream Studios provided holiday cards with a beautiful winter Church Street scene 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.

Thank you, **Love and Blessings** who ran 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 received holiday gifts thanks to our generous community! Many of you dropped off gift cards and gifts, ordered gifts online, and ran donation drives.

Brian's North End Automotive offered a discount to COTS employees again this year!

City Market hosted its 27th 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 raised **\$17,182.15**. **The Intervale Center** also planted a tree for every tree sold.



Thank you, **Betsy and Jim Bahrenburg; Candace Smith; Chris Russell; Colin and Donna Sturgess; Colleen Perron; Colleen Syron; Delia Clark; Devan Cameron; Downs Rachlin Martin PLLC; Erica Cox; Erin Altermatt; Francine and Michael Mellott; Ian Speers; Iris and Ed Darling; Jacqueline; Janet Boucher; Joan Goodell; John Peterson; Kim Coe; Laura and Paul Campo; Lee Nelson; Liz Dyer and Jason Kolesnik; Lynne Bond; Marcia and Randall Corey; Mary Ann Burlingame; Mary Kay Woods; Michael and Kathleen Knauer; Michael Healy and Debra Blumberg; Monica Jackson; Oh My Dog VT; Pamela and Leo Roberts; Paulette and Steve Rocheleau; Rebecca Clough; Rebecca MacDonald; Ron and Dawn Plante; Ronald and Agnes Regan; Sana at Stowe; Sheri Mason; St. John Vianney Church; Stacey Francese and William Flender; United Church of Colchester; Vermont Information Processing, Inc.; Wellspring Chiropractic Lifestyle Center**; and many more for donating toys, games, gift cards, and craft supplies for children in COTS shelter and services.

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

Thank you, **Vermont Business Magazine**, for donating ad space to us.

COTS EVENTS

Thank you for gathering with us for the **COTS Candlelight Vigil**. We honored those who have died while homeless or are currently experiencing homelessness through vignettes and candle lighting. Thank you to **our wonder-**

ful longtime friends and supporters for reading at this event. Thank you **Sugarsnap** for donating delicious cookies, and **Starbucks** for gifting us hot cocoa and coffee.

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, making us your Facebook cover photo, and of course, donating to end homelessness in Vermont! **Thank you, COTS volunteers, staff, past**



Letter of Gratitude to COTS

COTS received this letter from a previous Family Shelter guest. Only names and identifying features have been changed or removed. Letters like these remind us of the value and importance of our work. Thank you for being a part of the COTS community.

I am an international Ph.D. student at the local university. My journey to higher education in the United States was filled with aspirations and determination, but **I never imagined the hardships my family and I would face simply trying to secure a place to live.** Funded through the Faculty of Arts and Sciences, my single-student stipend initially seemed sufficient. However, the reality of supporting my wife and two young children while covering Vermont's high cost of living quickly became overwhelming. With the average rent for a two-bedroom apartment ranging from \$1,500 to \$3,000 per month, I found myself in a situation where my stipend wasn't enough. My wife, on an F-2 visa, was legally prohibited from working, leaving us with no additional financial support. Faced with these impossible circumstances, I had to make one of the most complex decisions of my life: I left my family behind.

I lived alone in the U.S. for over a year, while my wife and young children remained in our home country. The emotional toll was unbearable. I missed their milestones, laughter, and the simple joys of being together. Each day reminded me of the moments I was losing, the time I could never get back. I felt like I had abandoned them, and the weight of this separation affected my mental health, my research, and my overall well-being. The loneliness was suffocating, and as months passed, I feared that by the time we could reunite, I would have missed the most precious years of my children's lives.

Determined to find a way to bring my family back together, I searched relentlessly for housing options. I applied to an affordable housing program and remained on the waiting list for over a year with no success. Landlords rejected me due to my low income, and my options dwindled. Just when I was beginning to lose hope, I met Ben from ANEW Place, who told me about family shelters in Burlington. With my single-student housing lease about to expire, I had nowhere else to turn. Desperate and with time running out, I applied to COTS family shelter, praying for a miracle. That miracle arrived through Emily at COTS Family Shelter, who promptly responded to my application. Her kindness and efficiency gave me hope when I needed it most. She gave me the

information I needed to navigate the process, reassuring me that I had an option to work with. That first sign of support made all the difference, and from that moment on, **COTS became the foundation upon which my family's new beginning was built.** Months later, I finally reunited with my wife and children. After 16 long months, I again held my wife and children in my arms. That moment marks our first embrace after more than a year apart. This was a gift I will cherish forever.

COTS didn't just give us a place to live; they gave us stability, dignity, and a chance to move forward. The staff and administrators treated us with kindness and respect, never making us feel like charity cases but like a family they genuinely cared about. People like Emily, Evie, Jennifer, Stephanie, Eve, North, Ben, Gina, Chris, and Erin (CVOEO) became our support pillars. Their simple yet powerful words—"If you need anything, please let me know"—gave me a sense of belonging and relief during some of the darkest times of my life. COTS provided far more than just shelter. They offered us guidance, resources, and a pathway to proper stability.

Evie went above and beyond when my children arrived to help navigate the school system, ensuring they had a place to learn and grow despite arriving mid-year. Jennifer's tireless efforts in advocating for our financial stability and working towards securing permanent housing changed the course of our future. Every staff member at Main Street Family Shelter made COTS a temporary residence and a home. **The impact of COTS on my life is immeasurable.** Without their help, I might have lost everything—my family, education, and dreams. They saved us from homelessness, from despair, and from being torn apart indefinitely. And today, I am overjoyed to say that we have finally secured a permanent home! **My family and I now have a stable place to call our own, where we can grow and thrive.**

To the directors, management, staff, and volunteers of COTS, my gratitude knows no bounds. Your kindness and generosity have given my family a future, and I will forever be thankful.

To anyone reading this, I urge you to support COTS in any way you can. Your donations, volunteer work, and advocacy all have the power to change lives, just as they changed mine. Every contribution helps keep families together, shelters the vulnerable, and restores hope to those who need it most. COTS saved my family and my future. And with your help, they can continue to save so many more. I have the deepest gratitude.

board members, and longtime partners for making these calls. With your help, **we surpassed our goal of \$275,000**. Thank you, **Leonardo's Pizza**, for providing our callers with the perfect meal.

EastRise Credit Union 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.

DONATIONS, DRIVES, & COTS WISH LIST

Thank you, **Fourbital Factory**, for donating 400 high quality beanies.

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

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

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

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

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

Ohavi Zedek Synagogue donated vouchers to Shalm Shuk for our clients, again this year!

Special thanks to those who have donated from our wish list or have set up donation drives. Thank you, **Andrew and Leslie Griffiths; Angela Kirouac; Angelica**



Tringale; Ann and Leighton Laughlin; Annie Kluetmeier; Barbara Sirvis; Bobbi Holzel; Catholic Daughters of the Americas; Market Onion River Co-op; Colchester Middle School; Donna and Joseph Hart; Downs Rachlin Martin PLLC; EastRise Credit Union; Eileen Blackwood and Lynn Goyette; Ellen Halpin; Emily Alford; Estelle Emmons; Garvin Warner; Gerald Coleman; Greek Orthodox Metropolis of Boston; Ian Speers; Janet Boucher; Jason Fitzgerald; John Kelley; John Savo; Julian Barritt; Karen Franko; Katherine and Ryan Walsh; Keen's Crossing; Krysta Gottfried; Laurie Allen; LeAnn and Philip Rettew; Lindsey and Matthew Noble; Living Well Center; Mal Rich; Masonic North Star Lodge; Mater Christi School; Meghan Fitzpatrick and Robert Behrens; Michael Healy and Debra Blumberg; Monika Busse; Moose Lodge #1618; Myti; Nancy and Lynn Pruitt; Order of the Eastern Star; Patricia Towle; Patrick and Lenore Noble; Peet Law Group; Price Chopper / Market 32; Sabina Masic; Sabrina Dhaliwal; Saint Michael's College - MOVE Office; Sandy Brown; Sarah and Tim Maher; Sarah Bassett; Senft Miller Family; Sharon Powers; Starbucks; Tara Arcury; Ten Thousand



The COTS Walk is designed to be educational, engaging, and interactive. Our 2025 Walk theme is: "Building a better future."

Villages; Teresa Smith; The Richards Group; The Seth Warner-Rhoda Farrand Chapter of the Vermont DAR; The UVM Foundation and Alumni Association; Tim and Judy Palermo; UVM Health Network; Wanda and Dan Bezio; Wellspring Chiropractic Lifestyle Center; WOKO/ WJOY Radio; XPO; Zachary Belanger; Zumiez Foundation; and so many more for donating necessary hygiene products, comfort items, gift cards, and other helpful items.



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. We appreciate you.

Thank you, **Little Caesars Pizza**, for donating meals to the new Warming Station.

Thank you, **Mirabelles Bakery**, for donating birthday cakes for children celebrating their birthdays while staying at Family Shelter.

Thanks to **The Coe Family** for providing Christmas Breakfast.

Thank you to these wonderful groups and individuals for donating food and meals to our Daystation drop-in shelter. It is no easy feat to feed 70-100 people, and we appreciate every single one of you. Thank you, **All Souls Interfaith Gathering; Andrew and Leslie Griffiths; Bossy Posse, Carol and Scott Boardman; Chi Alpha Vermont; Coe Family; COTS Board; Essex Catholic Community; First Congregational Church of Essex Junction; Margaret Roy; Gregory and Robin Rabideau; Halle**



Sobel; Kurt Reichelt; Love & Blessings; Lynne and Scott Jaunich; Michael and Cynthia Shanks; The Mountain Mamas; Owen Nutter; Peg and Paul Gagne; Richmond Congregational Church; Ruth and Friends; Saint Michael's College; Sai Center; Saint Michael's College - MOVE Office; Sherpa Foods; St. James Episcopal Church; The Bakerhill Family; The Cathedral Church of St. Paul; The Farmhouse Group; The Mountain Mamas; The Zelemyer Family; Vermont Day School; and more. Many of these people have donated lunches multiple times!



2025 COTS Walk

Founded in 1988, the COTS Walk is one of our oldest and most important peer-to-peer fundraisers. Every year walkers of all ages from businesses, schools, religious organizations, and neighborhoods come together from all over the region to participate. The Walk begins and ends in Battery Park with music from Jenni & the Jazz Junketeers, Ben & Jerry's ice cream, and fun activities.

This family-friendly event guides walkers along a 3.6-mile route through downtown Burlington visiting some of the shelters and facilities that COTS operates. At this event, COTS seeks to illustrate the path a person experiencing homelessness might take when utilizing COTS services to educate our community about homelessness in our region. Bring your friends, family, coworkers, dogs, and strollers.

New on the route this year: We are excited to add our recently acquired building at 58 Pearl Street to the Walk route. Come and see the extensive renovations that will be underway in May! This enhanced version of our Waystation program will expand its capacity by 55% and greatly improve the program space through trauma-informed design and a less congregate model.

Not only does COTS build new physical spaces to provide shelter, supportive services, and housing (including the new Waystation Adult Shelter location), we are also building a more just, inclusive, and equitable future for all by advocating for systemic change at all levels. Together, we can take action now to build a better future

**COTS**

PO Box 1616
Burlington, VT 05402-1616
802-864-7402
www.cotsonline.org

Non-Profit Org.
U.S. Postage
PAID
Permit No. 896
Burlington, VT



STEPHEN MEASE PHOTOGRAPHY

Save the Date! 2025 COTS Walk

When: May 4, 2025; first Sunday in May

Where: Battery Park

Registration: begins at 1pm

Walk time: begins at 2pm

Who Walks? Walkers of all ages, from businesses, schools, social and religious organizations, and neighborhoods come together from all over the region to participate in the annual COTS Walk.

Why Walk?

- To increase 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.

Register at:
give.cotsonline.org/COTSWalk2025

Please join us!