

White River Junction Health District Community Projects

August 4, 2023

Backbone Organization: Public Health Council of the Upper Valley

Website: <https://uvpublichealth.org/about-phc/>

White River Junction's Data Driven Problem Statement:

Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) as well as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, Asexual and plus (LGBTQIA+) community members have higher levels of mental health challenges and substance use disorder, diagnosed and undiagnosed. These conditions are both caused by and contribute to isolation, other chronic health conditions, and not feeling safe.

White River Junction's Community Goal/Vision:

The Upper Valley is a lively, growing, safe, and inclusive community where, by working together, marginalized communities have access to the power and resources necessary to ensure equitable access to health care, education, housing, food security, and other socioeconomic needs.

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One Heart Wellness Cooperative

One Heart Wellness Cooperative is a cooperative local space where member organizations and individuals can enjoy and offer quality, accessible, holistic practices, products, and services. The



leadership is diverse and committed to providing space for affinity groups to host programs created by and for their communities. The cooperative will also serve as an incubator space for small business development, including BIPOC and LGBTQIA+-owned businesses. As cooperative, One Heart Wellness is owned and operated by the membership with a goal of ensuring membership fees are not a barrier to joining.

Storytelling Events for BIPOC and LGBTQIA2S+

This program will design and host three community storytelling and listening events in White River Junction to honor and share the healthcare-related experiences of BIPOC and LGBTQIA2S+ individuals. The events will be in the style of town halls, but the storytellers will be community members. The facilitator will generate a report from the events that anonymously summarizes the experiences of storytellers and provides local healthcare providers and decision makers with a roadmap for improving services to BIPOC and LGBTQIA+ community members. By hosting community storytelling events, healthcare institutions will receive clear guidance enabling them to provide compassionate, culturally informed, equitable health services. When healthcare institutions listen to the stories of their communities, policies begin to reflect the expressed needs of those they serve.

Telling My Story

Telling my story will host two 4-hour workshops with mental health providers and community members in the Upper Valley that will address the urgent need for mental health providers to expand awareness and cultural competency with respect to BIPOC and LGBTQIA+ communities and individuals. Building on the work of the Storytelling events of a fellow grantee, Telling My Story workshops are aimed at increasing the cultural competencies, equity orientation, and overall accessibility of mental health providers towards marginalized people such as those in the LGBTQIA+ and BIPOC communities.

“We do not expect to be able to educate providers on every element of the experience of being marginalized. Rather, we hope to instill awareness of privilege, power, the need to listen, and the need to act in order to build a more just society.”

Safe Spaces for BIPOC

Safe Spaces seeks to create space for Black, Indigenous, and other People of Color (BIPOC) and Aspiring White Allies to connect, learn, and heal as we fight for our collective liberation. Safe

Spaces will strengthen individuals, communities, as well as institutions, businesses and agencies through creating partnerships with other established racial justice organizations to provide guidance, resources, and physical and figurative space to work through systematic, systemic, and institutional prejudice and racism. Program offerings include: BIPOC Youth Programs (Read It & Eat it, Jol Indaba), Family Programs (Soul Food Programs, Game Nights), Adult Programs (BIPOC Women's Group, Social Club), and special events from covering topics such as Mental Health in the BIPOC community during Winter months, BIPOC Women in Jazz and the Arts, and Growing Financial Literacy in the BIPOC Community.

Community Resilience Organizations

Community Resilience Organizations of Vermont (CROs) support grassroots community organizing by people most likely to be harmed by and marginalized by large scale emergencies, such as Hurricane Irene and the COVID pandemic. CROs' programs support the health and wellbeing of grassroots organizers in underserved, marginalized communities, and scales them up with a concerted geographical focus. As part of this grant process, CROs will build out their Community Wellness Program and Grassroots Organizing Hub in the White River Junction area with programs designed for BIPOC, LGBTQA, and other marginalized grassroots organizers. The goal is twofold: 1) to offer 50+ "community wellness gifts" to marginalized and unpaid organizers who may experience burn-out or trauma as a result of their work and 2) to engage with 8-10 new healing practitioners in providing these gift services as paid for by CROs.

Liberation Library (Every Town)

The Liberation Library will be a space for BIPOC in the Upper Valley to gather, create, learn, and share. The library will offer books, tools, art supplies and digital resources on loan at no cost and also serve as a gathering place for events, performances, craft shows and more and will be a model shared with other communities.

The Liberation Library will strengthen several current partnerships with NEFOC's Every Town project. For example, Vermont Releaf Collective members will have access to all programming and with over 260 Releaf members, a large concentration of who are in the Upper Valley, this will serve as a central gathering and sharing place for members of this virtual BIPOC Vermonters collective. The Neighbors Network will hold anti-oppression book groups and skill shares increasing the number and quality of anti-oppression trainings and skill shares available in the area as well as increasing conversation about race and the associated awareness and solidarity in our communities and Just Construction, a collective of volunteer carpenters, will offer free building and tool safety classes."

Windsor Central Supervisory Union (WCSU)

Grant money awarded by UVCHEP enabled the Windsor Central Supervisory Union to put on a formal dance for 200 LGBTQIA+ students. The dance was designed by the student members of

Woodstock Middle School/High School's Queer Straight Alliance (QSA) and open to similar clubs at nearby schools. It provided a safe, happy experience for students who might otherwise not attend such events, and allowed them to make a typical high school experience uniquely their own. The event's goals were to decrease isolation and loneliness and increase a sense of belonging, worth, and self-respect. Mental health and LGBT+ service providers also staffed booths and tables at the dance, helping to connect students to resources that can support their mental and physical health long past the event itself.

AthletaFit

As a result of AthletaFit's programming, members of the BIPOC and LGBTQIA+ communities in the Upper Valley will have access to online monthly exercise training through the Trainerize app. By participating in this 8 week strength training program for approximately 90-120 minutes per week, individuals will have the opportunity to gain capacity in their physical health and well-being. AthletaFit aims to make this training available for at least 25 BIPOC and LGBTQIA+ community members for 2 months. The program seeks to address the health disparities of higher levels of mental health challenges and substance use disorder by reducing isolation and improving chronic health conditions among these underserved populations. The grant funds will be used to sustainably support the launch of this new initiative.

Unlikely Riders

Unlikely Riders bring folks together to break and reduce a sense of isolation, foster community connection and conversation, and improve mental wellbeing through investing and supporting BIPOC and LGBTQIA community members with no cost access to winter recreation, education and resources.

Over 150 BIPOC and LGBTQIA+ community members will be served through our Upper Valley events through community ski and ride days allowing our members to ski and ride at no cost, including community instruction and gear (winter layers and snow gear) this season. Our intention through this programming is for folks to be in BIPOC affinity to build joyful and fulfilling relationships with outdoor spaces and winter in Vermont, New Hampshire, and the Upper Valley. Our work is often in places (ski areas) that have historically been exclusive, inaccessible, and unwelcoming to Black, Indigenous, and People of Color, poor and working class people, and queer and trans BIPOC folks. Our organization is rooted in creating long term belonging, healing, and joy through relationship building with winter, snow recreation, and outdoor movement and our leadership is currently all LGBTQIA+ BIPOC folks, two of whom grew up in the Upper Valley area.

Abenaki Garden

The Abenaki Garden project is providing food, teaching Abenaki gardening, culture and history in the Upper Valley. Planning began 2yrs ago, and work started at the garden in August 2022 to prepare the space for winter and plant some trees and bushes.

The "Abenaki Garden" project presents traditional Abenaki agriculture to the public. Utilizing Food source trees, berries, herbs and vegetable varieties native and cultivated for thousands of years in Vermont, the garden recreates the concept of N'dakinna (New England) before 1492. A Fire Circle is also created as a place for Abenaki speakers to tell stories, teach Abenaki culture and perform public ceremonies for public education events. Inspiration to create this space came upon reading a plea from an Abenaki Chief asking folks with land and gardens to take their gifts of ancient seeds and grow them to share the food with the tribe because they had lost all their land and need the food. Thus, the true purpose of this project is to grow food for the Abenaki Peoples. Seeds for the project are donated by Abenaki Bands. Funds will be used for materials to construct the fencing, build a rain barrel watering system, compost, trees, bushes, and supplies.