NEW INITIATIVE for Childcare

Energy Efficiency for EVERYONE

Towns Collaborate in WHITE RIVER VALLEY

WELCOMING Newcomers
Vital Communities engages Upper Valley people, organizations, and communities to create equitable solutions to our region's challenges.

To fulfill this mission, we will:

- Identify, include, engage, and connect diverse groups in our community so that our goals and approach are informed by people of all ages, genders, races, cultures, faiths, abilities, educational backgrounds, professions, documentation status, income levels, sexual orientations, and geographic locations throughout the Upper Valley;
- Recognize and challenge systemic racism and all forms of discrimination in our organization and community;
- Incorporate justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion in all our efforts

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On The Cover:
Sarah Copeland Hanzas of Bradford looks exhilarated after volunteering for an April 2021 mobile home roofing project for Bradford resident Terry W. The project was part of the Energy Burden collaboration between Vital Communities and COVER Home Repair, a White River-based nonprofit that offers free and affordable home repair. Photo courtesy of COVER.

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At Vital Communities we are proud to serve as a convenor and organizer, bringing together people throughout the Upper Valley to help our communities thrive.

One of our projects is to support and coordinate Town Energy Committees in our region. These committees cut energy bills for our region’s towns, educate neighbors about energy-saving opportunities, advocate for strong town and state public policies around clean energy and climate, and collaborate with other towns to make a region-wide impact. There are now more than 35 in the Upper Valley, with new groups forming every year.

The six years since we began working with the committees have been productive ones. With the help of resources and events Vital Communities coordinates, the committees have run multi-town campaigns helping homeowners adopt solar energy and weatherization measures, saving them money and lowering greenhouse gas emissions that cause climate change; and the committees have been the backbone of the Upper Valley E-Bike Library. Other projects have included serving as e-bike and electric car “ambassadors”; sharing information about renewable energy and conservation through fairs, workshops, listserv posts, and more; and increasing their town’s EV charging stations.

More recently, Energy Committees have directed their work toward lower-income residents, who often face structural barriers to accessing weatherization programs and the benefits they offer. These are the folks who bear the greatest “energy burden”: Although lower-income households use less energy than those with higher incomes, their expenses make up a much bigger portion of household income. In essence, it’s as if lower-income households are being taxed at a much higher rate for something essential to survival.

These efforts include the Mobile Home Energy Savings Outreach program, a collaboration of Vital Communities, the White River Junction-based nonprofit COVER Home Repair, and 11 participating Town Energy Committees. The program trains committee members to reach out to their neighbors about energy help that is available for low-income households and mobile homes. Some committees have also teamed up with the Maine-based nonprofit Window Dressers, creating insulating window inserts, more than half of which went to lower-income households. In both programs, people got to know each other across income differences that can often divide even small communities.

At Vital Communities, we believe in energy efficiency for everyone. There’s still a lot to do in relieving the energy burden borne by people in our region in both home heating/cooling and transportation. But great partnership and innovation are taking place. Thank you to everyone helping make our community as equitable and resilient as we believe it can be.

Sarah Jackson, Executive Director
Energy Efficiency for EVERYONE

Ever since the Arab Oil Embargo of 1973 closed the spigot on cheap oil, “energy efficiency” has been part of the American vocabulary, especially with the new urgency to cut the greenhouse gas emissions that cause climate change. The past 50 years have brought huge innovations in renewable energy and energy conservation technology and programs, which save money and cut energy bills.

But there’s a gap in who is benefiting from these advances: Even though lower-income households use less energy on average than higher-income households, they usually bear a much higher energy burden: the percentage of household income spent on energy costs. A 2018 US Census study found that Vermont households with incomes below $27,800 spend an average of 18.3 percent of their income on energy—roughly seven times the portion of income paid by households with incomes above $118,000. These energy expenses fall mainly into two categories: thermal energy, or the fuel and electricity for heating and cooling your home; and transportation, such as the cost of gasoline for getting around.

What’s being done to address the unequal energy burden?

Here’s a look at recent programs by Vital Communities and its partners that aim to make energy efficiency possible for everyone.

Sharing Information

One resource in the struggle to tame the energy burden is the Upper Valley Energy Advocacy Council (EAC), which Vital Communities coordinates. Begun in 2018 as a conversation between staff at LISTEN and the Upper Valley Haven hoping to create better energy solutions for lower-income people, the council now includes representatives of the municipalities of Lebanon and Hartford, Southeastern Vermont Community Action, faith organizations, and Twin Pines Housing Trust. EAC projects have included working with landlords, creating fuel assistance cards, and training energy burden advocates to help local agencies deal with clients’ needs in this area.

"Energy burden has two pieces—there’s the energy part and the burden part," said Listen Community Service Program Director Angy Zhang, who helped found the council. "I felt I had a good grasp of the burden part but that there was so much I didn’t understand about the landscape of sustainable energy. I had fallen into the trap of thinking that sustainability is for people who can afford it."
Vital Communities and the energy experts “helped me understand that a lot of these programs could really, really benefit people in poverty or struggling. I hope what I have been able to bring to the table is that some of these programs were not really designed for people who were low-income,” leading to a discussion about how to improve them, she said. “By specifically focusing on the energy burden as it disproportionately impacts people in poverty, it continues to be a really helpful meeting.”

Using Neighbor Power to Improve Mobile Home Weatherization

When it comes to thermal efficiency, homes in the Upper Valley are at a disadvantage for three reasons. First, our homes are old, with 54% of New Hampshire homes and 59% of Vermont homes built prior to 1980. Second, we use more oil and propane than the rest of the country, two particularly expensive and polluting heat sources. Finally, our winters are cold and long.

While 283 Upper Valley homes were weatherized through campaigns Vital Communities ran with Town Energy Committees (see "Grassroots Energy Savers") from 2017 to 2019, this effort didn’t work well for many lower-income people, said Sarah Brock, Vital Communities Program Director of Climate, Energy, Transportation. "The reality is, many of our neighbors can’t afford to spend money upfront for the long-term benefits of weatherization, or can’t make improvements to their homes because they don’t own their homes."

Now in year three, the Mobile Home Energy Savings Outreach program is specially designed to work with those neighbors, particularly those living in mobile or manufactured homes. Although an important source of affordable housing—especially as part of nonprofit or resident-owned communities such as Whistlestop in Bradford, Red Maple in Springfield, or Riverside in Woodstock—mobile homes tend to use more energy per square foot than “stick-built” homes, and many contractors don’t know how to best weatherize them.

Bookmark These Links!

We just got through winter—why should I think about weatherizing my home?

In a word, summer. Weatherization also keeps your home cooler in the summer, adding comfort and lowering energy bills. So getting weatherization done in spring pays off immediately.

And there’s lots more you can do to lower your energy burden.
Here’s where to go to:

Get help planning and financing improvements: vitalcommunities.org/all-about-weatherization

Get help paying high energy bills and getting weatherization: vitalcommunities.org/energy-help

Learn more about energy burden: vitalcommunities.org/energy/energy-burden

Join local energy and climate efforts: vitalcommunities.org/energy/local-energy-action

Learn more about getting around without a car: vitalcommunities.org/transportation

Learn more about Window Dressers: vitalcommunities.org/window-dressers

See the 2022 schedule for the Upper Valley E-Bike Library: vitalcommunities.org/ebike-library

Talk with an e-bike ambassador: thefordvt.gov/government/energy-committee
The program teams Vital Communities and the Town Energy Committees with the White River Junction-based nonprofit COVER Home Repair, which has a wealth of experience and techniques for weatherizing mobile homes and effectively serving more vulnerable populations. COVER’s techniques include installing insulated skirting around the base of mobile homes and rigid insulation under new roofing material. The program has also enabled COVER to experiment with ways of weatherizing mobile homes and test their effectiveness to help contractors enter that market.

So far, 11 towns (Hartford, Norwich, Rockingham, Sharon, Bethel, Chelsea, Hartland, Randolph, Springfield, Thetford, and Woodstock) have taken part. Sustainable Woodstock took part in the program in 2021 and is doing a second round of outreach this spring to mobile home residents. Their outreach is guided by an online Energy Burden Toolkit created by Vital Communities: resources for organizing town volunteers, reaching out to neighbors, and helping them sign up for energy help programs they qualify for, from fuel assistance to weatherization and home repair.

“The toolkit was really helpful,” said Sustainable Woodstock Program Director Jenevra Wetmore.

“We are a small nonprofit and would not have been able to launch a campaign on our own. It was great to have access to the information and cheatsheets that Vital Communities provided so we could talk to people about what energy burden is and what programs are available.”

Collaborating to Improve Public Transit

In a rural area like the Upper Valley, transportation is a particular challenge—and burden. Rural communities are hard to serve with public transit because the population density is so low. We tend to rely on cars, more each year. From 2011 to 2021, the average annual miles driven per person increased by 20 percent in New Hampshire, to 11,570, and by 14 percent in Vermont, to 13,004.

This is a burden for us all—more traffic congestion and danger for bikes and walkers—but it places a special burden on people with lower incomes. To get anywhere, they need cars—costly to buy, repair, and fuel. According to a 2021 study by the American Council for an Energy-Efficient Economy, the average American household spends 7 percent of its income on gasoline for transportation, but households that earn less than 200 percent of the federal poverty level range are spending about 15 percent.

Addressing this challenge is the task of the Upper Valley Transportation Management Association. Founded in 2003 and convened by Vital Communities, UVTMA brings transit providers and others together to plan and share practices and resources. The current 20-plus representatives speak for not just transit companies but also employers, municipalities, biking and pedestrian advocates, and regional planning commissions.

Expanded Bus Services

The communication and planning that happens through the UVTMA is one reason the Upper Valley has one of the nation’s best rural bus networks, and it’s growing.
In the Upper Valley, our more than 35 Town Energy Committees have been a powerhouse in helping people save energy and lower their utility bills. Coordinated since 2016 by Vital Communities, the committees are the workforce behind Vital Communities’ Weatherize, Solarize, and Energy Burden campaigns; the E-Bike Lending Library; and open-air energy expos that share user-friendly information about ways to save energy and cut greenhouse gases.

Joanna Sharf, a self-employed electrician who lives in Cornish, joined her Town Energy Committee in 2014 when Cornish took part in the “Solarize” campaign, which the Cornish and Plainfield Energy Committees are reviving this year.

Why she joined: “I just thought Solarize was a brilliant idea for a campaign and I wanted to help out.”

What she’s proudest of: “Our educational events. We’ve run presentations on heat pumps, electric cars, and other things. During the pandemic, we started publishing ‘Did You Know?’ articles on our local listserv.”

What keeps her on the committee: “My fellow committee members are wonderful people, and I learn so much. The impact of climate change is dire and distressing, but learning how to counter it is so interesting. There’s a lot of positive information out there.”

Want to join or start an energy committee in your town?
Go to vitalcommunities.org/town-energy-committees

Four transit companies transport people within our region.

- **Advanced Transit**, serving Canaan, Enfield, Hanover, Hartford, Lebanon, Norwich, and coordinating with the three companies that bring riders from outside the core Upper Valley area
- **Tri-Valley Transit**, serving communities along I-89 and I-91 north of White River Junction and Lebanon and offering trips within Orange and northern Windsor Counties
- **Southeast VT MOOver**, serving communities along I-91 south of White River Junction and offering trips within southern Windsor County
- **Southwestern Community Services**, serving Claremont, Charlestown, and Newport, and linking to Lebanon
New services along these routes include:

- Tri-Valley Transit midday service on I-91 north of White River Junction, and connecting the Thetford I-91 stop with the Sharon I-89 stop
- Southwestern Community Services buses going directly from Claremont to Lebanon
- Fare-free service throughout most of the system

The UVTMA has helped make these expansions happen. “All these new services wouldn’t be possible without us working together, Sullivan County and the Upper Valley,” said Teri Palmer, Transportation Director for Southwestern Community Services. “It’s taking both counties to get things done.”

The UVTMA helps transit companies not only talk and plan with each other to coordinate services or talk through challenges but also see how transportation connects to housing patterns and community needs, said Mike Reiderer, Community Relations Manager of Tri-Valley Transit.

The UVTMA also has helped the companies navigate COVID. During the early shutdown months, riders were urged to stay off buses if possible, to leave them for those who had no other options.

Starting in January 2021, however, public transit became one of the most COVID-safe areas of public life because of clear and strict guidelines under President Biden’s Executive Order on COVID-19 safety in domestic and international travel, “to save lives and allow all Americans, including the millions of people employed in the transportation industry, to travel and work safely.”

Now what’s needed are more riders. “Maximizing the current use is going to let us grow,” said Mike Reiderer, Community Relations Manager of Tri-Valley Transit.

MARK YOUR CALENDAR

Local Energy Showcase
Thursday, May 12, 7-8:30 pm
Register at vitalcommunities.org/energy-showcase-2022

Each year, Vital Communities hosts a Local Energy Action Showcase featuring stories from energy committees and other volunteer groups working on energy and climate issues at the local level. Projects recently featured include outreach about available energy assistance programs, e-bike lending libraries, public education events, multi-town efforts, and more. As in 2020 and 2021, this year’s event is virtual. Don’t miss it!

View highlights from past Local Energy Showcases at vitalcommunities.org/local-energy-success-stories
"If we can show the needs and meet the needs and serve more employers and provide more trips locally, that’s going to help us grow to be more of a first choice for people instead of the first choice being to hop in your car." Even if it’s an electric car, he said, “We certainly appreciate the advantages there, but there’s always a part of me that says ‘More electric vehicles on the road are still more vehicles on the road.’"

Those who do choose the bus stand to save a lot of money, said Reiderer. "You look at gas now being $3.50 a gallon and estimates of car ownership—between payments and maintenance and fuel and insurance, it’s easily $10,000 a year. If a two-car family is able to become a one-car family because of public transit, that’s a significant savings regardless of your income frame."

The Growing Option of E-Bikes

Bikes offer huge benefits as a mode of transportation, for riders and the community as a whole, including better health, less congestion of roads and parking, and greater connection to one’s surroundings. But they often aren’t practical as everyday transportation, especially given the long distances, hilly terrain, and variable weather of the Upper Valley.

E-bikes have been closing that gap, with electric motors to help riders mount hills, cover distances, and haul loads. With winter tires and protective clothing, e-bikes can even be a year-round option. But the initial cost of an e-bike—while much less than a car—can prove a hurdle, as can figuring out what model best fits your needs.

Helping to make e-bikes affordable for all is Vital Communities’ E-Bike Subsidy program. A pilot version funded by VTrans in 2021 resulted in 16 e-bikes being purchased, 15 by individuals and one for shared use by Hartford Dismas House, a residential program for people coming out of incarceration.

Wrote one of the subsidy recipients, “[E-bikes] are a fully functional option for transportation given the right setup and knowledge of safety and for anyone who struggles to afford an automobile are a much more cost-effective solution.”

Other programs can help people choose the right e-bike. Now in its third year, the Upper Valley E-Bike Lending Library is a fleet of four e-bikes that travels from town to town, hosted by Town Energy Committees or local libraries, enabling residents to “check out” an e-bike for a few days to try using it for commuting or recreation. Towns also host open “Demo Days” for those looking to briefly try an e-bike in an easy and supportive environment.

From its first year, the library has grown from six to nine to an anticipated 11 towns this summer, as well as a pilot employee-focused collaboration with Hypertherm, enabling their employees to try out bikes. Started as an offshoot of a program run by Burlington-based Local Motion, the Upper Valley library is now under Vital Communities’ umbrella.

A Hartford Dismas House resident with the house’s shared e-bike acquired with a subsidy.
Digital toolkits for “climate farmers.” Research shows that organic and regenerative farming techniques help us adapt to climate change and cut the greenhouse gas emissions we produce. Three new digital toolkits help farmers adopt climate-friendly techniques and share the good news with the public. The toolkits contain a variety of educational materials, graphics, and worksheets that farmers can access for free.

Go to vitalcommunities.org/farming-and-climate-change to find links to any of the three:

- Climate-Friendly Digital Marketing and Outreach for Certified Organic Farmers
- Climate-Friendly Digital Marketing and Outreach for Farmers Not Certified as Organic
- Implementing Climate Adaptation and Mitigation Practices on the Farm

LOCAL FIRST HAS A NEW LOOK!

Locally owned businesses strengthen the Upper Valley economy, culture, and wellbeing. Independent businesses re-circulate three times more money in our community than national chain stores, while non-local e-commerce shifts most of your money out of our regional economy. Keep your dollars where your heart is and support businesses and organizations with the Local First sticker on their door!
The current Leadership Upper Valley class graduates in June, having had a mix of in-person and virtual days over the program’s 10 months. One in-person day focused on education, which included a meal, tour, and student presentations at the Hartford Area Career and Technical Center (at right). One of the virtual sessions was Justice Day in February, planned by Robert Sand, former Windsor County State’s Attorney and Founder of the Center for Justice Reform at Vermont Law School. Justice Day examined inequalities in our criminal justice system and compared conventional and restorative justice in preventing crime and repairing its harms. “An amazing session,” wrote one participant. “Every one I think is my favorite, and then the next one is my favorite.”

Interested in joining the Class of 2023? Apply by May 27. Learn more at vitalcommunities.org/leadership-upper-valley

The Local Crowd Upper Valley wrapped up 2021 with a successful crowdfunding campaign to support Revels North’s Christmas Revels Festival. Their outdoor performance “Lighted Candles in the Winter Trees” at Colburn Park in Lebanon warmed our hearts despite the chilly weather. With the Revels campaign and others, TLCUV so far has raised more than $300,000 for local projects that create positive change. Stay tuned for more crowdfunding campaigns in 2022! Learn more at vitalcommunities.org/vital-economy/the-local-crowd-crowdfunding

Upper Valley Everyone Eats continues to help local food growers and makers and people in need. Since September 2020, this hub of Vermont Everyone Eats has worked with 10 local restaurants (including Moon and Stars, below) and more than 45 partners—mainly food shelves, community meal sites, senior centers, schools, and churches—to distribute 167,000 nutritious, locally sourced meals to Upper Valley Vermonters experiencing food insecurity. Participating restaurants have earned $1.67 million total (at $10/meal) and in turn paid $122,000 to local farmers and food producers. “What’s been most inspiring is to see how we can come together at a time of need and help each other, and in the process make our whole community stronger,” said Lauren Griswold, Vital Communities Manager of the program.
The Upper Valley Teaching Place Collaborative brought together educators and others for a March 9 webinar on place-based service learning. Attendees heard from a team from Pomfret’s Prosper Valley School about projects its fifth and sixth grades worked on at the school as well as Marsh-Billings-Rockefeller National Historical Park and the Pomfret community arts center Artistree. The projects included studying the local salamander life cycle, building and maintaining trails, restoring a greenhouse and sugar house, and building benches and informational signage.

If you missed the webinar, watch the video at vitalcommunities.org/past-event-videos-resources. And if you want to hear more about place-based education, go to vitalcommunities.org/upper-valley-teaching-place-collaborative.

This April, Local First turns Earth Day into Earth Month with a 30-day campaign amplifying climate economic resilience in the Upper Valley. The campaign will spread the word about climate-related events, community groups and projects, business ventures, informational resources and more, including how climate resilience touches Vital Communities’ work, from food and farms to transportation to energy to housing.

Learn more at vitalcommunities.org/earth-month.

Also, mark your calendar for these other Local First campaigns:
- Independents (Businesses!) Month (July)
- Eat Local Month (August)
- Placemaking Month (September)
- Shop Indie Local Holiday Season (October-December)
New Faces and Initiatives at Vital Communities

Vital Communities’ programs come from and are driven by regional needs and community interests. Year by year, new challenges and opportunities emerge in the Upper Valley, and Vital Communities strives to bring people together to address them. Read on to learn about three new initiatives and seven new staff members. We invite you to learn more at the links provided and get involved!

Some issues are too big and complex for individual towns to tackle on their own. With that in mind, the White River Valley Consortium is a new collaboration of 14 towns near the White River in Central-Eastern Vermont whose first goal is to increase affordable housing for entry-level workers and beginning entrepreneurs across its region. This project is coordinated by new Vital Communities staff member Sarah Danly, who previously worked with the Vermont Farm to Plate Network and is involved in grassroots community development work including the 4-Town Coalition and White River Land Collaborative. This three-year project is part of the Working Communities Challenge, a partnership between Vermont, the Federal Reserve Bank of Boston, the private sector, private philanthropy, and the communities. Learn more at vitalcommunities.org/the-white-river-valley-consortium

How can we increase childcare access and affordability in the Upper Valley so our families and workplaces can thrive? Upper Valley employers and families both name access to high-quality, affordable childcare as one of the key barriers to prosperity in our region, especially for low- and moderate-income families. Formed after a two-session symposium on this issue hosted by Vital Communities in November 2021, the Early Care and Education Initiative brings together many stakeholders to address this challenge. Andra Daunhauer has joined the Vital Communities team as the interim project manager, bringing more than 20 years of experience working with children and families in their homes and community-based settings. The Couch Family Foundation, the City of Lebanon, and Dartmouth College are funders and active participants in this three-year effort. Learn more at vitalcommunities.org/early-care-education

Newcomers are part of what makes a place interesting, yet newcomers to a rural place like the Upper Valley can sometimes find it hard to feel at home. The new Upper Valley Chapter of the Vermont Welcome Wagon Project aims to shorten the time it takes newcomers to get familiar with their community by connecting them with local hosts. This project is coordinated by Leona Bergman-Gaul, Vital Communities’ new Events and Communication Coordinator, who brings experience with organic farming, community outreach, and communications, most recently at Cedar Circle Farm and Education Center. Upper Valley Welcome is a partnership between Vital Communities, the Green Mountain Economic Development Corporation, the 4-Town Coalition, the Space on Main, and the Upper Valley Young Professionals. Learn more at vitalcommunities.org/upper-valley-welcome

The challenges of housing and transportation are often intertwined—which is why Vital Communities hired a two-person team of John Haffner and Ellen Hender to oversee projects in those areas. Ellen has worked with individuals, children, and families experiencing homelessness for the past nine years, most recently at the Upper Valley Haven; John has spent the past nine years on research, teaching, and community engagement related to major infrastructure projects.

Our Administrative Team is strengthened by two additions. Bookkeeper Shantida Oakheart has worked with numerous small businesses and nonprofit organizations and believes that “working to support one’s local community is the best way that we can support a better world for us all.” Development Director Arianne Arnold, who joined us from a similar position at the Upper Valley Waldorf School, said she was drawn by “the opportunity to nurture relationships with more of my neighbors and be of greater service to my community.”
Thank you, Volunteers!

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<td>Judith Falk</td>
<td>Amelia Kahl</td>
<td>Simon Parsons</td>
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<tr>
<td>Charlotte Faulkner</td>
<td>Linda Kahl</td>
<td>Guy Payne</td>
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<tr>
<td>Elsie Fichman</td>
<td>Thomas Kahl</td>
<td>Elyse Payson</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sharon Francis</td>
<td>Abby Kajja</td>
<td>Eric Peirce</td>
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</table>
This list of fiscal year 2021 (July 2020 through June 2021) volunteers has been prepared with care. However, if we’ve inadvertently omitted your name, please contact us!

Janet Peirce    Walter Scott    Robin Tindall
Lizann Peyton    Ronald Shaiko    Inge Trebitz
Jennifer Phipps  Lynn Sheldon    Gail Trede
Bill Ploog       Anne Silberfarb  Finnie Trimpi
Betty Porter     Evan Smith      Kelley Tully
Stuart Price     Rebecca Smith   Paul Vallee
Monique Priestley  Stuart Smith  Amy Vanderkooi
Sylvia Provost    Vicki Smith    Julia Viazmenski
Scott Putney     Kim Souza      Tom Ward
Michael Quinn    Sophie Starr   Richard Warren
Melissa Quinn    Peter Stein    David Watts
Markell Ripps    Kelly Stettner Peter Welch
Heather Sabourin  Judy Stone    Ken Wells
Cori Santagate   Kathleen Stowell Jennifer Wilcox
Kenneth Sawyer   Rob Strong     Sally Wilson
Christine Scales Steve Taylor  Diana Wright
Meg Schindler    Fred Thomas    Pat Zacharski
Barry Schuster   Jennifer Thompson

Our volunteers give their time, expertise, and passion in so many ways. If you would like to join them, some ready-made opportunities are:

• Valley Quest Box Monitor: Adopt one of our 160+ Valley Quests as yours to check and report on a few times each spring and summer. Email volunteer@vitalcommunities.org to learn more.

• Volunteer Driver: Vital Communities helps our transit companies find volunteers to give rides to people who lack transportation. Find out how to volunteer at vitalcommunities.org/transportation/getting-around

• Photographer: Share your photos of Upper Valley indoor and outdoor locations! Email rebecca@vitalcommunities.org

• Upper Valley Welcome Host: Be a friendly contact to a new Upper Valley resident. Learn more at vitalcommunities.org/upper-valley-welcome

Do you have other ways you would like to share your time and talents? Let us know at volunteer@vitalcommunities.org!

Tuck student Quest volunteers in 2017.
Refresh Your Questing!

The Upper Valley never stops changing—and neither does our library of Valley Quests, self-guided, resident-written "treasure hunts" that teach you about special places. Whether you’re new to the Upper Valley or go back here many generations, you’ll find new vistas in this collection. And check out the two new Quests just added this year!

Learn more at vitalcommunities.org/valley-quest

The new **VINS Quest** explores the fascinating 47-acre site of the Vermont Institute of Natural Science in Quechee! The Quest leads you to key places while you solve a riddle, letter by letter. Marking its 50th anniversary this year, VINS will showcase the new Quest as part of an April 23 Earth Day celebration. The Quest includes the spectacular Canopy Walk, which is accessible to all levels of mobility while taking you among treetops and offering views of the Ottauquechee River.

A lot of the Upper Valley’s forests are relatively young, so it’s a treat to encounter some of the older trees. The new **Glebe Quest** leads you to some of Thetford’s oldest, largest trees while crossing through forests owned by Thetford Academy, Thetford Hill State Forest, and Upper Valley Land Trust. You’ll encounter a variety of tree species as well as other facts about the area’s natural and cultural history. The Quest was created by students in the Environmental Studies and Outdoor Education course including Finn Linehan and Ryan Molloy, by a 200-year-old red oak, and Justin Robinson, by a blowdown.