



Report of the
**Vermont Vision for Youth Success
Action Symposium**
Greenway Institute | Montpelier VT | December 12, 2024



Report of the

Vermont Vision for Youth Success Action Symposium

December 12, 2024

Introduction

Over the past two years, the Vermont Council on Rural Development (VCRD) and an Advisory Group of youth and adult leaders conducted a deep engagement process with people of all ages across the state to collect input and ideas for ensuring youth opportunity and success. Called the Youth Opportunity Initiative, this process gathered input from youth, community and municipal leaders, educators, business leaders, policy experts, and more through a series of youth-adult co-facilitated forums in every region of the state, youth-led discussions around the state, stakeholder interviews, and a statewide survey reaching every corner of Vermont.

The process gathered input from over 600 Vermonters of all ages, including more than 200 youth. Throughout the process and in each community, we heard inspiring examples of how to create the conditions for youth success: from a library's partnership with the school, or a young person and selectboard working together to engage more youth in municipal governance, or a group of young people working with a statewide organization to bring a new program or youth space to their community.

We gathered the stories and ideas for action into a report – the “Vermont Vision for Youth Success” – which lays out a framework of policy and programming recommendations to achieve a future where our youth are more deeply connected to their communities and where they can aspire to engage, thrive, and lead in a multicultural democracy and marketplace.

After completing the report, it became clear that we needed to bring youth and adult leaders together to think about prioritized actions and how to accomplish them. So in December 2024, we hosted the *Vermont Vision for Youth Success Action Symposium* at the Greenways Institute in Montpelier which brought over 70 youth and adults together to consider the most important actions to take right now to support Vermont youth.

This report outlines the five crucial actions that attendees identified and what steps we could take toward meeting these goals. Attendees were engaged and enthusiastic about the path ahead and contributing to it.

At the Symposium and on the road, we heard time and again the common ground people share when they imagine our communities having what they need for youth to thrive and succeed. Most importantly, although not surprisingly, we heard and saw that our youth are ready to lead and show us the world they envision if we are ready to step in and serve that vision by working together in creative and collaborative ways.

We offer this report and the entire Youth Opportunity Initiative process in service to the many people and organizations who are already working to support youth success, and while we list below the attendees of the Symposium in December of 2024, we know there are hundreds more who will be inspired to join us as we take next steps.

Summary of Symposium

On December 12, 2024, VCRD hosted the Vermont Vision for Youth Success Action Symposium in partnership with a youth and adult facilitation team from UP for Learning. Almost 80 people from across the state joined us to review the priorities identified in the Vision for Youth Success report and consider what actions to take to support our youth aspiration and opportunity. Invitations were sent to youth and adults working on youth services and priorities in Vermont and other critical partners for the next phase of this work.

We spent the morning building personal connections with each other and becoming more familiar with the Vermont Vision for Youth Success Report. Using the report as backdrop, small groups chose two action recommendations that they felt were the most important to bring back to the full group for prioritization.

Next, the whole group considered the recommendations and voted for actions they felt were most important to work on right now. The priorities chosen were:

- 1 Improve transportation for access to youth spaces and activities**
- 2 Continue to fund, expand, and support the community schools model in Vermont**
- 3 Maintain a stable source of funding dedicated to youth spaces and activities**
- 4 Increase genuine and diverse youth voice in community and school leadership bodies**
- 5 Increase access to mental health care providers in schools**

In the afternoon, participants self-selected into one of five groups to create action plans. Each group – ranging in size from five to over twenty participants – brainstormed and discussed policy and resource barriers, partnership opportunities, engagement and outreach needed before coming to conclusions, and identified action steps that they would like to see existing and new partners focus on to achieve success.



Action Plans developed by Participants

The following are the action plans as well as barriers and resource ideas or partnerships that might help create breakthroughs.

1 Improve transportation for access to youth spaces and activities

Build on the existing variety of shared, public, and micro transit systems, and look for collaborative and creative solutions to increase accessibility. Even in towns with no access to public transportation, there may be a church with a van, school buses, or businesses with vehicles. Partnerships might make new transportation options possible.

Priority Actions

- Create a VTrans report on how the agency is currently serving or engaging youth
- Create a map of public transit options organized by school district.
 - Identify whether sending towns have access to routes to and from school.
 - Add info about public transit to school bulletin boards.
- Find out the impact and cost of meeting needs, including increased public transit routes & stops during after-school hours (2-6pm).
- Make maps and plans for safer connections for biking and walking between schools or youth spaces and public transit.

Resources & Partnerships

- Agencies, businesses, and orgs that offer bussing, local transit authorities
- Bus drivers, volunteer drivers for local groups like churches, senior centers, food shelves, and senior service providers
- Road commissioners and municipal leaders
- Agency of Transportation, Transit Division and Civil Rights Division
- Possible state, federal, or private funders
- Local constituents — youth, parents, seniors, commuters — understanding their transit patterns and their vision will illuminate problems, needs, and opportunities
- Organizations and businesses (such as health providers, afterschool programs, senior services, HireAbility, and more) that would benefit from transit solutions
- Mobility and Transportation Innovations (MTI) Grant Program
- Tri-Valley Transit, Green Mountain Transit, MooverBus, Public transit in Burlington, Rutland, Bennington, Rural Community Transportation, etc.
- Regional Planning Commissions and VTrans for help identifying state and federal funds
- Youth advocacy at municipal and state levels with support and prep from groups like VLCT, Action Circles, or Transportation for Vermont (T4VT) and other public transit and bike & pedestrian advocacy groups.
- Vermont's National Summer Transportation Institute (NSTI) camps
- Youth Internships at VTrans and State District Garages

2 Continue to fund, expand, and support the community schools model in Vermont

The community schools model describes schools as a resource hub that provides a broad range of support including health care, social support, community events, educational services, and more. This makes services easier to coordinate and access for families and students. One of the 5 pillars of this model focuses on “safe, inclusive, and equitable learning environments.” The model is meant to foster a community culture where all students, families, and community members feel healthy, safe, and supported in achieving their learning goals. The State of Vermont is currently funding a handful of dedicated pilot projects under 2021 Act 67.

Priority Actions

- Create a shared understanding: refreshed vision for education and community:
 - The State’s Community Schools Pilot programs are not the only schools already practicing the principles of the “Community Schools” model.
 - Inventory all districts and report back ways that all schools are practicing the tenets.
- What exists already in our community to support the Community Schools model?
 - Identify the existing partnership and relationships schools have, e.g. supporting mental health.
 - Work with AoE to share the inventory of Community Schools partners for communities, school boards to look at.
 - Create a tool kit for communities and schools to map their local potential partners.
- Works towards a long-term model for a credentialed Community Schools team for each community or school district, with grassroots support and state funding.

Resources & Partnerships

- Local constituents, including marginalized groups, families, and volunteers
- Local partners including businesses, libraries, health care providers, faith groups, farms, and groups serving refugees and immigrants
- Educators including teachers, administrators, afterschool providers and school board
- Agency of Education, Agency of Human Services, and legislators
- ACCD and community development corporations and organizations
- UVM Leahy Institute for Rural Partnerships; Catamount Community Schools Collaborative; and College of Education and Social Services
- National Community Schools Network
- Mental Health Designated Agencies and prevention networks
- MENTOR Vermont
- 802 Smiles
- Shelburne Farms education and professional development programs
- VT Rural Education Collaborative
- 4-H network
- Youth Risk Behaviors Survey
- McClure Foundation, Alchemist Foundation, A.D. Henderson Foundation, Tarrant Foundation, VT Children’s Trust, Children’s First Finance, Vermont Community Foundation, National Life Group

3 Maintain a Stable Funding Source Dedicated to Youth Spaces and Activities

There are limited funding sources in Vermont that can support spaces dedicated to youth leadership and activities — both start-up costs and the ongoing operation of the space and programs. The 2023 Act 78 Afterschool and Summer Grant program is a great start toward providing funding and the flexibility to support third space and afterschool programs. We must ensure the sustainability and flexibility of this funding source in the long-term to continue to offer and grow alternative programming models like teen centers for middle and high school aged youth.

Priority Actions

- Organize stakeholders to develop and spread a unified message about the value and impact of youth spaces, including via lobbying and other advocacy channels.
 - Work with academic institutions to study and report on impacts of programs and resources and add value to advocacy efforts.
 - Collaborate with youth to highlight success stories and advertise resources.
- Survey existing Third Space, Afterschool, and Summer programs.
 - Identify and report the challenges they face in the current funding structure.
 - Identify workforce challenges and opportunities.
 - Work with existing entities to expand and replicate their success.
- Engage communities without programs or spaces and provide technical assistance for developing that infrastructure.
 - Develop a resource guide of funders and programs to support youth spaces.
 - Develop a team to support existing or start-up programs in applying to funding.
 - Coordinate fiscal sponsors to support underserved communities.
 - Develop program management training resources.
- Host youth-focused events like summits, camps, and leadership networking opportunities.

Resources & Partnerships

- Fair Share
- UVM, VTSU, CCV - their programs that contribute to third spaces; their programs that could study the impacts of youth spaces.
- Private Foundations
- Youth and family voices at the center of this work, especially from marginalized groups
- United Ways of VT, designated mental health care providers, and prevention networks
- Local groups like faith groups, businesses, libraries, senior centers, and municipal leadership
- Engage to understand and work with those who are against youth centers/spaces.
- Educators from schools, afterschool programs, third spaces, and camps
- Legislators and policy makers
- Agency of Education, Agency of Human Services, Child Development Division/licensed providers
- Federal Delegation (Bernie, Welch, Balint)
- Vermont Afterschool
- Outright VT
- UP for Learning
- VT State Youth Council
- VT Youth Center Alliance

4 Increase genuine & diverse youth voice in community and school leadership bodies

Include several youth positions on governance bodies like School Boards, Town Governance, State Governance, boards of trustees and advisory boards for non-profits and business groups. Seek ways of engaging youth on their terms and work to empower them to lead on issues they are passionate about. To do this, we need to support communities and youth with the skills they need to succeed.

Priority Actions

- Develop a resource guide and training for municipalities on youth positions or involvement in governance and outreach for regular youth engagement.
- Develop training for youth on the Youth Declaration of rights and how to engage adult-dominant leadership bodies like nonprofit, municipal, and state governance.
- Increase School participation in programs that center youth voice in leadership and decision making; work towards student positions on educational leadership bodies.
- Increase collaboration between policy makers and existing youth leadership bodies such as the VT State Youth Council, the VT Youth Lobby, the VT Youth Project, the VT Youth Development Program's Advisory Board, local Youth Councils, Vermont Students Against Racism, Our Voices Xposed, VT Kids Against Tobacco, and more.
- Provide resources and funding for youth-driven initiatives, including multi-year financial support.

Resources & Partnerships

- Youth leadership bodies such as the VT State Youth Council, the VT Youth Lobby, the VT Youth Project, the VT Youth Development Program's Advisory Board, local Youth Councils, Vermont Students Against Racism, Our Voices Xposed, VT Kids Against Tobacco, VT Energy Education Program, VT Youth Conservation Corps, and more.
- Superintendents, School Boards, Principals, Civics Teachers, and school leadership
- Agency of Education
- UP For Learning
- VT Afterschool
- Outright VT
- VT League of Cities & Towns
- VT Council on Rural Development
- Rural Youth Catalyst
- Quality Youth Development Program
- Local municipal leadership & committees
- Local nonprofit institutions and businesses
- VT Office of Racial Equity
- Model organizations with youth leadership and board positions (ie. NBNC)
- Private Foundations

5 Increase Access to Mental Health Care Providers in Schools

Strategies could include district collaboration to scale up services, fostering partnerships with community providers, providing tele-health services, and improving policies and funding for mental health services in schools.

Priority Actions

- Increase the number of professionals in Vermont to meet the high need.
 - Renew and expand funding for the Mental Health Professional and the Psychiatric Mental Health Nursing Forgivable Loan Programs, implemented through VSAC, which expands access to education programs in mental health careers and directly grows the workforce.
 - Support and expand access in schools through telehealth
 - Expose youth to the spectrum of mental health careers
 - Policy makers could maintain larger, more stable funding for school mental health
- Center perspectives of lived experience and minority representation in designing prevention and response.
 - Develop minority and youth representation in decision making bodies
 - Bring more youth voices to the Legislature and State Agencies to discuss
- Marshall existing organizations and coalitions to coordinate and amplify their work
 - Connect the adult and youth councils/boards and service providers so that they can coordinate efficient use of resources and provide holistic care
 - Build connections between policy makers and professionals and advocates

Resources & Partnerships

- VT Care Partners
- The regional Designated Agencies and Statewide Service Agencies
- Project AWARE model of coordination
- VTrans and Vermont Public Transportation Assoc.
- Partners for Prevention and other Community Prevention Programs
- VT Youth Development Program, VT Teen Institute, VT Youth Project
- UVM, VTSU, CCV, and other institutions with degrees or programs in the field
- VT Dept. of Mental Health, VT Dept. for Children & Families, VT Agency of Education
- Legislators
- VT Office of Professional Regulation, VT Psychological Association, VT Mental Health Counselors Association, VT Counseling Network, VT Cooperative for Practice Improvement and Innovation

Follow Up and Potential Collaboration

At the end of the day we asked participants to consider what follow up actions and structures would be helpful to ensuring that this work moves forward. Responses ranged from personal commitments to hopes for statewide action on key issues. But a few themes recurred on what the partners in the room can do together to take next steps on the actions prioritized and developed during the afternoon. Here are the major themes for partnering on next steps.

Regular Convenings and Follow-ups

- Organize annual or bi-annual symposiums to review progress and set new goals.
- Conduct follow-up meetings, both virtual (Zoom) and in-person, to maintain momentum and accountability.
- Create a process for checking in on action steps, assessing progress, and redirecting efforts as needed.

Collaboration and Coalition Building

- Build alliances between agencies, organizations, and schools (e.g., VT Afterschool, UP for Learning, VT SYC).
- Create coalitions or working groups for targeted action on specific issues (e.g., mental health, transportation, DEI).
- Establish interagency partnerships to share resources, ideas, and progress.
- Create working groups to focus on implementing specific action items.

Communication and Resource Sharing

- Share updates, reports, and actionable steps with broader audiences, including those who weren't present at events.
- Develop a toolkit for fostering youth-adult partnerships and empowering youth voices.
- Use listservs or other communication tools to connect youth-serving organizations and share opportunities.
- Map existing efforts to avoid duplication and identify gaps.

From experts already serving youth, to experts working outside of youth spaces, to youth who are experts by experience of the issues at hand, the participants at the Symposium began to think about how “youth issues” are issues that impact everyone of all ages in Vermont and can be influenced by people from many different backgrounds and careers. This understanding is critical to keep at the forefront of what comes next. As a practical follow up, VCRD, Up for Learning and other stakeholders are exploring which organizations and youth might be interested in leading the work in each of the five priorities identified at the Symposium. If you wish to contribute to any specific area, please reach out to info@vtrural.org.

In addition, participants and organizers alike recognize that there are many other individuals and groups working on youth success. VCRD is remaining open and curious about our role moving ahead and we encourage organizations working in this space to look at the recommended actions outlined in this report and consider what pieces they might take on. VCRD will continue to engage with stakeholders and invite them to reach out to each other as we all step up together to give it the attention and resources needed to keep the momentum going.

Participants

Geena Baber, Two Rivers-Ottawaquechee Regional Commission

Kaylee Billings, Student Voice Committee

Lauren Brady, VT Council on Rural Development

Ted Brady, Vermont League of Cities and Towns

Chatham Brouillette, Student Voice Committee

Chad Butt, MENTOR Vermont

Megan Camp, Shelburne Farms

Rachel Campbell, Vermont Agency of Transportation

John Castle, Vermont Rural Education Collaborative

Tom Cheney, Advance Vermont

Margaret Coan, University of Vermont Extension, 4-H

Erin Davison, Norwich Public Library

Harmony Devoe, VT State Youth Council, Ed. Justice Coalition

Sophia Donforth, Vermont Energy Education Program

Ginger Driscoll, Greater Falls Connections

Will Eberle, Capstone Community Action

Elizabeth Emmett, NEK Community Action

Luke Foley, Friends of the Mad River

Adleigh Franke, VT Youth Conservation Corps - Harwood UHS

Elizabeth Frascoia, Governor's Institutes of Vermont

Ben Freeman

Margaret Gibson, VT Council on Rural Development

Avalon Gray, Youth Development Program

Matt Habedank, Northwestern Counseling & Support Services

Johannes Haensch, Agency of Education

Lindsey Halman, UP for Learning

Charlie Hancock, Future of Vermont Action Team

Loralei Hill, Our Voices Xposed - WNESU

Sarah Hooghuis, Green Mountain Audubon

Aliyah Ivey-Leake, VT State Youth Council

Anthony Jackson-Miller, Office of Racial Equity

Mea Ree Jan, Up for Learning

Alyssa Johnson, VCRD & Waterbury Selectboard

Michele Karode, UVM Leahy Institute for Rural Partnerships

Mercedes King, Youth Development Program & OCYFA

Breck Knauft, Vermont Youth Conservation Corps

Phil Kolling, SerVermont

Julie Kozak, ECHO Leahy Center for Lake Champlain

Emily Langkowski, Our Voices Xposed - WNESU

Kai LaRosa, U32 Middle High School

Patrick Leduc, VT Student Assistance Corp.

Addie Lentzner, VT Students Against Racism Network

Michael Livingston, Sharon Elementary Board Member

Astrid Longstreth, VT State Youth Council

Kayla Loving, Education Justice Coalition of VT

Bonni Luna, Student Voice Committee

Giada Lynne Willet, Ed. Justice Coalition, VT State Youth Council

Mike McRaith, Vermont Principals' Association

Nicole Miller, Vermont Afterschool

Julie Moore, VT Agency of Natural Resources

Courtney Mulcahy, Shelburne Farms

Chelsea Myers, Vermont Superintendents Association

Ellie Neckers, UP For Learning

Keri Newton, Our Voices Xposed - WNESU

Elise O'Brien, U32 Middle High School

Katie O'Shea, Vermont Afterschool

Laurel Omland, VT Dept. Mental Health

Robyn Palmer, VT Secretary of State's Office

Auishma Pradhan, UP for Learning

Monique Priestley, Future of Vermont Action Team

Nicole Rice, Boys and Girls Club of Rutland County

Sarah Rob, U-32 Student Council

Maya RJ Russell, VT State Youth Council

Michelle Salvador, VT Dept. of Health - Family & Child Health

Jessica Savage, VT Council on Rural Development

Riley Savage, Student

Natalie Searle, Community College of Vermont

Brianne Smith, Vermont Afterschool

Denise Smith, VT Council on Rural Development

Jacoby Soter, UP for Learning

Zoe Souder, Elevate Youth Services - Youth Development Program

Ruth Steinmetz, Winooski Working Communities

Samantha Stevens, North Country Supervisory Union

Rebecca Tatistcheff, U-32 Middle and High School

Anna Telensky, VT Student Assistance Corp

Emanuel Van Fleet, U-32 Student Council

Sara Vargo, VT Student Assistance Corp. GEAR UP

Jade Walker, U32 Middle High School

Beth Walsh, Vermont State University, ROAD to Success

Carolyn Weir, McClure Foundation

Taylor Welch-Plante, The Bristol Hub Teen Center

Asah Whalen, Agency of Education

Susannah White, UP for Learning

Matt Wolf, Vermont Afterschool

Acknowledgements

This effort was a result of the Youth Opportunity Initiative of the Vermont Proposition. The Proposition was led by the Future of Vermont Action Team. You can learn more about the Youth Opportunity Initiative in the Vermont Vision for Youth Success report which was designed and authorized by the Youth Opportunity Advisory Group, and online: futureofvermont.org/youth-opportunity-initiative.

The Vermont Council on Rural Development (VCRD) is grateful for the input and participation of all who joined this Action Symposium. We also appreciate those who supported the Symposium with their time, energy, funding, or expertise, including several members of the Advisory Group who consulted on the design of the event and Ian Reid who supported the set up and food logistics for the event. Our special thanks go to:

Co-Facilitators and Co-Planners

UP for Learning for sharing in the design, planning, and facilitation of the Symposium and follow-up steps. Executive Director Lindsey Halman, Youth Program Specialists Mea Ree Jan, Ellie Neckers, Auishma Pradhan, Jacoby Soter, and Program Director Susannah White all worked closely with VCRD staff to co-plan the goals and then set up and facilitate the entire agenda.

Financial Sponsors

The Youth Symposium adult-youth facilitation partnership as well as the use of the Greenway Institute's space was made possible by our generous sponsors:

- The Alchemist Foundation
- Northeastern Vermont Regional Hospital
- The Vermont Community Foundation



9 Bailey Ave #1, PO Box 1384, Montpelier VT 05601-1384 | 802-223-6091 | info@vtrural.org

vtrural.org

 facebook.com/VtCRD