



New Milford Social Services

2024-2025 Annual Report



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The mission of the Social Services department is to connect financially stressed residents to resources aimed at enhancing their well-being and self-sustainability by offering opportunities to reduce some of their financial burdens. This can include assistance with basic needs like food, housing, heat and utilities, children's needs, medical and transportation costs, etc. It can also include a connection to services that address other factors that increase vulnerability to financial crises. Some of these issues may include job loss, lack of insurance or severe illness, mental health and substance use issues, homeless diversion and family system impacts.

Our community continues to feel the shock of a shifting national economy. Many are struggling and faced with making tough decisions of what to pay first to maintain their homes while striving to hold onto or increase their emergency savings. This struggle reaches beyond our low income households to include many middle income households, reaching up to the town's median. Federal and State responses are shifting and programs local families have relied on to alleviate financial burdens like heat, utilities and food are becoming more challenging to sustain. In addition, salaries and wages are not shifting at an equitable level to meet these higher household expenses.

With all this in mind, New Milford Social Services remains committed to connecting residents to whatever resources remain to offset these economic hardships. New Milford Social Services holds steadfast to supporting our residents in financial need through empowerment, advocacy, compassion as well as connections aimed at building resilience and financial independence.

Our department continues to see an increasing number of people facing employment concerns, health and relationship challenges, and financial roadblocks

that continue to test their independence and ability to support themselves and their families without some kind of assistance.

We continue to see a high volume of people at Social Services. Over 1200 households of diverse characteristics including working families with children, single disabled households, and mixed generation households seek out services and resources through this office each year.

In fiscal year 2024-2025, the work of the Social Services department was carried out by five professionals: a full-time Director, a full-time Office Coordinator, a full-time Social Worker & Post-Crisis Navigator, a 35-hour Social Worker/Diverse Community Advocate and full-time Program & Volunteer Coordinator. We also could not fully function without the outstanding contributions of our devoted volunteers and compassionate community partners.

The core focus of this department is to assist residents (individual and family units) by connecting them to opportunities to ease their financial distress, to assist with social-emotional obstacles and also to work towards wider system changes that can positively affect our community's social cohesion. This report details our activities and main assistance programs of heating and utility assistance, food, housing, financial assistance, seasonal programs, and coordination with other community agencies and initiatives to positively impact various crises.



ENERGY ASSISTANCE: Heating assistance is one of the most sought after needs we address, impacting hundreds of households year-round. These programs help residents offset their heating burdens-fuel-based or electric-based. Social Services is the local intake and application site for residents under the age of 60. **The Connecticut Energy Assistance Program (CEAP)** is the most expansive of the heating assistance programs. Its application period is essentially from September to May. In FY 24-25, we processed 284

applications, returning \$212,735.00 in federal energy aid to residential households and local vendors (57% Renters/ 43% Homeowners). **Generation Power CT (formerly known as Operation Fuel)**, a non-profit energy assistance organization mainly funded by private and corporate contributions was also applied to help residents experiencing emergency heating situations. **24 of our local residents were helped through this office with \$9,947.86**. One important factor of Generation Power CT is that it helps to assist households whose income is just above State guidelines of 60% SMI; up to 75% SMI. These moderate income households still face financial constraints but opportunities for assistance are limited. Additionally, generous contributions from our greater New Milford supporters help fill in gaps in Federal and State funding through the local efforts of **The Community Fuel Bank**. Through this local charitable fund, shared with the New Milford Senior Center, **we assisted 36 Social Service households with \$11,572.07**. Local vendors continue to work with us to provide the best cost to help the Community Fuel Bank. **In total, 344 households were helped with \$234,254.93 in financial aid for their heat related home expenses.**



FOOD: *Every day, many Americans, including New Milford residents, are pressured to choose between paying rent/mortgage or utilities over food.* According to CT DSS reporting, 1,958 New Milford residents received SNAP benefits (food stamps) in 2024. And, according to the latest Census Bureau Data, child poverty in CT has reached 13.3% - doubled what it was in 2021. New Milford is not excluded from these statistical increases and there continues to be a disparaging gap between income and the cost of basic goods and services needed to sustain one's household. According to the ALICE 2025 Report by the United Way of Coastal and Western Connecticut, 44% of New Milford households (over 10,000) are struggling to make ends meet because they make less than the basic cost of living in our area. This percentage is higher than previous years and it includes those at poverty level and well above. Struggling with food insecurity is not restricted to families. Many seniors and disabled in our town struggle with food insecurity. Living on a fixed income leaves little room to accommodate the extra cost of food and personal care items. **The New Milford Food Bank** is our primary program to help fight food insecurity. We serve individuals, couples, and families with children, senior households and persons with disabilities. With the help of many community partners, donors, volunteers and staff, **we provided over 358,270 pounds of food (<102,000 meals) to 851 (unduplicated) local households.** Weekly visits

reached a new high of 11,342, growing 20 % over the last two years. Our pantry provides many nutritional choices including shelf stable food options, fresh and frozen foods as well as weekend bag lunches for children. **2444 adults, children and seniors utilized the pantry this year; a 4% increase from last year.** That is approximately 8.7% of our Town's population. We continue to see a higher utilization of the pantry, not just by the number of households that are registering but also by the frequency of weekly visits. More people are coming more often. **48% of users were families with children and 36% were senior households.** Each month the food bank program fed an average of 360 children and 182 seniors, two of our most vulnerable populations. An average of 385 unduplicated households have utilized the food bank every month.

Emergency vouchers to local grocers were given to 37 households for a total value of \$1,370, and an additional 38 households used \$1,175 in gift cards to help purchase gas. In addition, we were able to provide \$7,560 in gift cards to 378 food bank households during the December holidays. It is strongly worth noting that the food bank operation costs and inventory come solely from donations, monetary as well as in-kind goods. Donated funds are used to pay for emergency vouchers and to purchase food from local businesses as well as from CT Foodshare.

This year, we created a pilot summer lunch program to offset the extra financial burden on many families with children, once school is out. By summer's end, we provided 628 lunch bags to 207 local children. Each bag consisted of 3 pounds of luncheon meat and cheese, loaf of bread, fruit, carrot sticks, yogurt and assorted snacks. We were able to complete four bi-weekly distributions for a cost of \$7,650.90.

When budgets are restricted, choices of what to buy favor cheaper and less nutritious food items. Many families struggle to buy higher quality protein rich foods, whole grains, fresh fruits and vegetables. We continue to operate as a full-choice pantry with many nutritional options under the SWAP (Supporting Wellness At Pantries) guidelines. **We continue to provide a safe-space that allows us to offer a dignified and respectful operation for participants to shop, and also provide them access to our other services and to our social workers.** We continue to increase access to the food pantry through special appointments throughout the week, thanks to our **dedicated Program Coordinator, Wanda Fyler.** Her ability to manage the operations and the 25+ regular weekly volunteers, is essential to feeding about 1,100 persons

every week. To all these recipients, we were able to offer a wide assortment of meat, dairy, fresh vegetables and fruits, as well as low sodium, low sugar, gluten free, and organic items. In addition, a variety of non-food items such as personal care products, household cleaners, and home paper products were available. We are very appreciative to our charitable vendors and grocers, **Big Y, Stop & Shop, Aldi, Northville, CT FoodShare, Fort Hill Farm of New Milford, Washington's Judea Community Garden, Riverbank Farm of Roxbury, Food Rescue US-Northwest CT, Centerbrook Farm** and many others, who partner with us to provide bakery, fresh produce, meat, food rescue items as well as hosts to many community food drives. An outstanding mention to **Mountain High Organics for the continued support and most generous donations. We thank them greatly for their partnership.** We also owe a special thank you to **Kent School for continuing to provide hundreds of weekend lunch bags**, enhancing the ability for families to feed their children when not at school. Since, the New Milford Food Bank relies solely on community donation, we continue to see an impressive response from our community partners. For our food and financial donations we would like to thank: **The Silo, NM Lions Club, the Woman's Club of Greater New Milford, United Way of Western CT, New Milford Animal Welfare, Kimberly Clark, Paradice Classic Cruisers, the Rotary Club, AARP (New Milford and Brookfield chapters), the VFW Auxiliary, The Odd Fellows and Palm Rebekah Lodge, The NM Police Dept., NM Hospital, Candlewood Lake Club, Northville Baptist Church, St. Paul's Anglican Church (Brookfield), Temple Sholom, Our Lady of the Lakes RC Church, Housatonic Council #40 of the Knights of Columbus, First Congregational Churches of New Milford and Bridgewater, Washington Council of Churches, Trinity Lutheran, NM Church of Christ, and the United Methodist Church (for its pantry "Our Daily Bread"), Affordable Automotive, NM Fitness & Aquatics Club, Barkery Boo'tique and many other local businesses. Kimberly Clark, the NM Board of Realtors and local banks have also helped to keep the Food Bank going and to St John's Episcopal Church of New Milford for continuing their monthly food drive. In the schools, Northville, Hill & Plain, Sarah Noble, Canterbury, and Kent School, deserve an extra big shout-out for their on-going efforts. Schaghticoke and NMHS clubs and teams also held successful food drives and participated in "Walk a Mile for a Meal". Special thanks to our USPS Postal Carriers for their annual Stamp Out Hunger campaign. The Youth Agency, Mayor's**

Office and Town employees, also chipped in throughout the year. In addition, many warm thanks to the childcare centers, Girl Scout troops and other youth groups and businesses that held events or food drives and of course, our loyal individual donors. Special shout out to Jenn Arnau and the downtown businesses for stepping up their efforts to support us! Amazing! New Milford, as a whole, shined brightly through the multitude of generosity from so many individuals, groups and businesses that may go unnamed but, truly, not unappreciated. We do appreciate and rely on all of you!

To round off our connection to food assistance is the **New Milford Farmers Market Collaborative**. This is the ninth year of this program, which has given SNAP recipients more purchasing power by doubling their SNAP (food stamps) dollars to buy fresh fruits, vegetables, meats and bread from our local farmers. **56 people visited the market 204 times and purchased and matched \$11,302.00 in market coins (14.5% increase). Another successful year of sale growth for our local farmers and market customers.** We continue to have a strong and trusted relationship with our farmers and market vendors. We are very grateful to them for their continued support and acceptance of this important program. We are also extremely grateful to our fiduciary donors who have helped with our doubling incentives: **The Archbishop's Annual Appeal from the Archdiocese of Hartford and to Berkshire Agricultural Ventures for helping us increase matching funds to make it even more beneficial for our market SNAP patrons as well as to our individual anonymous donors dedicated to increasing food security with fresh healthy foods.** A thank you to the Town for ARPA funds which allowed first time New Milford visitors received free coins to use at the market (\$720 worth distributed).



HOUSING: Housing assistance inquiries are numerous throughout the year at Social Services. It is the largest expense that poses the most daunting challenge to many people facing budgetary constraints. Many renters have faced shocking increases in monthly rent by hundreds of dollars. The local rental stock is scarce and more competitive. A family of four looking for a 3-bedroom home would find it challenging to pay an average rent of \$2,700-\$2,900 plus heat and utilities. **According to the Out of Reach report from the National Low Income Housing Coalition, someone working minimum wage would have to work 70 hours a week to afford a modest one bedroom rental in CT.**

For those searching for help with housing, this office can provide a starting point. We provide

resources and referrals to housing agencies and advocacy with the goal of preventing an eviction or stabilizing a new tenancy. We continue to work to uncover any resources available to the families we work with to help them maintain their housing.

Our office assisted many with housing grants to offset a month of rent, security deposit, or mortgage. **The Hope Fund**, supported by community donations, helps to prevent evictions by assisting with rent, with mortgage payments, or supporting new housing with security deposits. **Last year, we assisted 40 residents with \$24,091.26.** We received substantial donations from the **Thrift Mart of New Milford**, **St John's Episcopal Church and many other individual donors to which we are extremely grateful!** Through the Renter's Rebate program we assisted **34 disabled households receive \$19,412.97 in grants** from the State of Connecticut.



FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE: We are the responding agency when New Milford residents, under the age of 60, experience financial hardships. We assess their presenting financial needs, including consultation and budget guidance, and work to connect individuals to programs to try to help manage their limited funds. Within critical times, we are fortunate to assist with financial aid grants through our **Good Samaritan Fund**. This year, we issued **98 grants and vouchers totaling \$23,756.49** to households in financial distress (28% increase from last year). Many of the crises involved utility shut offs, medical needs, critical car or home repairs/expenses, job or education related expenses, as well as for children like childcare costs, enrichment programs, camperships, school expenses and holidays. As with our other programs like the Food Bank and Hope Fund, the Good Samaritan Fund operates solely on donations from private and community gifts. **We extend our gratitude to our dear supporters: the ThriftMart of New Milford, Bank Street Investments and Village Green Events, to the Martha and Mary Fund of St Francis Xavier Roman Catholic Church and New Milford United Methodist Church for providing matching funds for some of our most vulnerable requests. Many more community groups and individuals have been so very generous. We are extremely grateful to all our donors.**



ARPA FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE: We continue to be able to offer access to these special funds provided to the Town of New Milford as part of the American Rescue Plan Act, to offset a financial burden put upon local households during and post the COVID-19 pandemic. **By end of FY 24-25, our efforts grew to**

assist 197 applicants with \$251,155.82 in grants. These funds helped pay rent, mortgage, utility and telephone, car-related and other home expenses, as well as medical care and child related expenses. Without an income restriction placed upon these funds, it gave us an opportunity to help several households, otherwise ineligible for most State and local assistance.



COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS: Our ability to accomplish much of the work we do at New Milford Social Services is not without the essential partnership and support of the greater New Milford community. Our office becomes a point of first contact for our partners and supporters to gauge community needs. These service providers include local civic and church groups, town departments, charitable organizations and youth groups, businesses and individuals, we have been extremely fortunate to be part of a team of compassionate supporters- a symbiotic relationship of giving and receiving that has improved the daily lives of many of our neighbors.

This department also participates in regional and statewide organizations that advocate for or follow related topics of poverty, healthcare, mental health care, housing, heating, food insecurity and hunger, financial fitness and literacy, and homelessness. We follow State and Federal legislation and topics relevant to our focus. New Milford Social Services participates and collaborates with other town offices, boards and commissions to share information and advocate for the mission of our department. We continue to be part of the CT Local Administrators of Social Services, the regional Housing Solutions Committee, NM Housing Partnership Commission, NMCAN (our local prevention council) and Region 5 Suicide Post-vention committee. We are also part of New Milford Community Response Team (NMCRT), a collaborative effort of our human services departments, first and second responders, and the Mayor's Office and the New Milford Food Insecurity Team (NMFIT). We are active members of the executive housing council for ODFC and the Southern Litchfield Council for the United Way.



VOLUNTEERING: Social Services continues to provide opportunities for many generous adults and students looking to give back to their community and gain valuable life skills. For many high school and college students this experience provides exposure into the field of human services and the impact economic systems have on many communities. **Our volunteer team is our greatest point of pride.** Many volunteers for years have devoted hundreds of hours and days to ensure the success of our programs. Within **FY**

24-25, 453 volunteers contributed 7397.5 hours with 1575 visits to assist us with various programs, including the food bank, seasonal programs and in-office help. These volunteer hours represent more than two full-time employees. These extraordinary volunteers work endlessly towards the success of all our programs. We cannot thank these generous and dedicated individuals enough for helping with these very vital programs.



SEASONAL PROGRAMS: When families are struggling to save for emergencies and unforeseen challenges it leaves even less for special events and holidays, therefore adding to their struggle and stress. For our families, these programs have been key to warding off any further financial crises. Our department takes a lead role in verifying residency, income means-testing, and registration for many seasonal and holiday programs. We work closely with many community partners to coordinate these seasonal programs. The Woman's Club of Greater New Milford, the United Way of Coastal & Western CT, Santa Fund committee, our local Faith community, NM Youth Agency and Parks & Recreation department have been stellar partners in executing these programs to optimize the benefit to our local families.

The following programs represent those community efforts to help these struggling families and offer them equitable advantages among their peers:

Program	Participants
• Bike Day	33 children
• Back to School Clothes	260 children
• Youth Agency scholarship	10 children
• S.A. Camp CONNRI	8 campers
• Parks & Rec Scholarship	44 children
• Thanksgiving Baskets & Meals	300 families
• Santa Fund Children	568 children
• Winter Boots	42 children
• Special Toy/Santa Event	152 children
• Gifts to Disabled Adults	47 adults

*Additional special mentions this year to the New Milford Refugee Resettlement Committee for continuing to help us fund camp scholarships and to the Santa Fund Committee for going above and beyond in fundraising, donor sponsorship and all the extra hours it took to help with this record breaking year of helping 288 families (568 children).

In closing, we remain steadfast to assisting those in financial crisis. We are committed to our mission of impacting the well-being and sustainability of New Milford residents in need. The people we see face frequent challenges, economically and emotionally, facing the harsh reality of financial insecurity that leads them to make tough decisions for themselves and their families. Some are dealing with many levels of crises, making it even more difficult to navigate these added challenges on their own. Our social workers, Alyssa Cole and Maria DeOliveira have spent thousands of hours working with our most vulnerable families and individuals whose additional life crises and challenges add further risk to their well-being and slowdown their journey towards self-sufficiency. It can be a humbling experience to ask for help but many strong, determined people have made that choice to come forward. We continue to see many resilient people, who persevere in the mist of obstacles. They face many roadblocks yet stand committed to move forward with determination. Our entire staff is focused on addressing the needs of these residents with compassion and professionalism, doing our very best to help them maintain their financial independence with self-assurance, and advocate for change to ease their burden.

We continue to pursue our goal to be a safe place for those in need. To offer resources and provide the basic safety nets necessary for self-sufficiency. Even in the midst of obstacles and waning resources, we also will continue to persevere.

We are grateful to be in the position to try to answer the call to help residents with even the basic of assistance as they try to rebuild and maintain their financial security and independence among this mutable economic environment.

