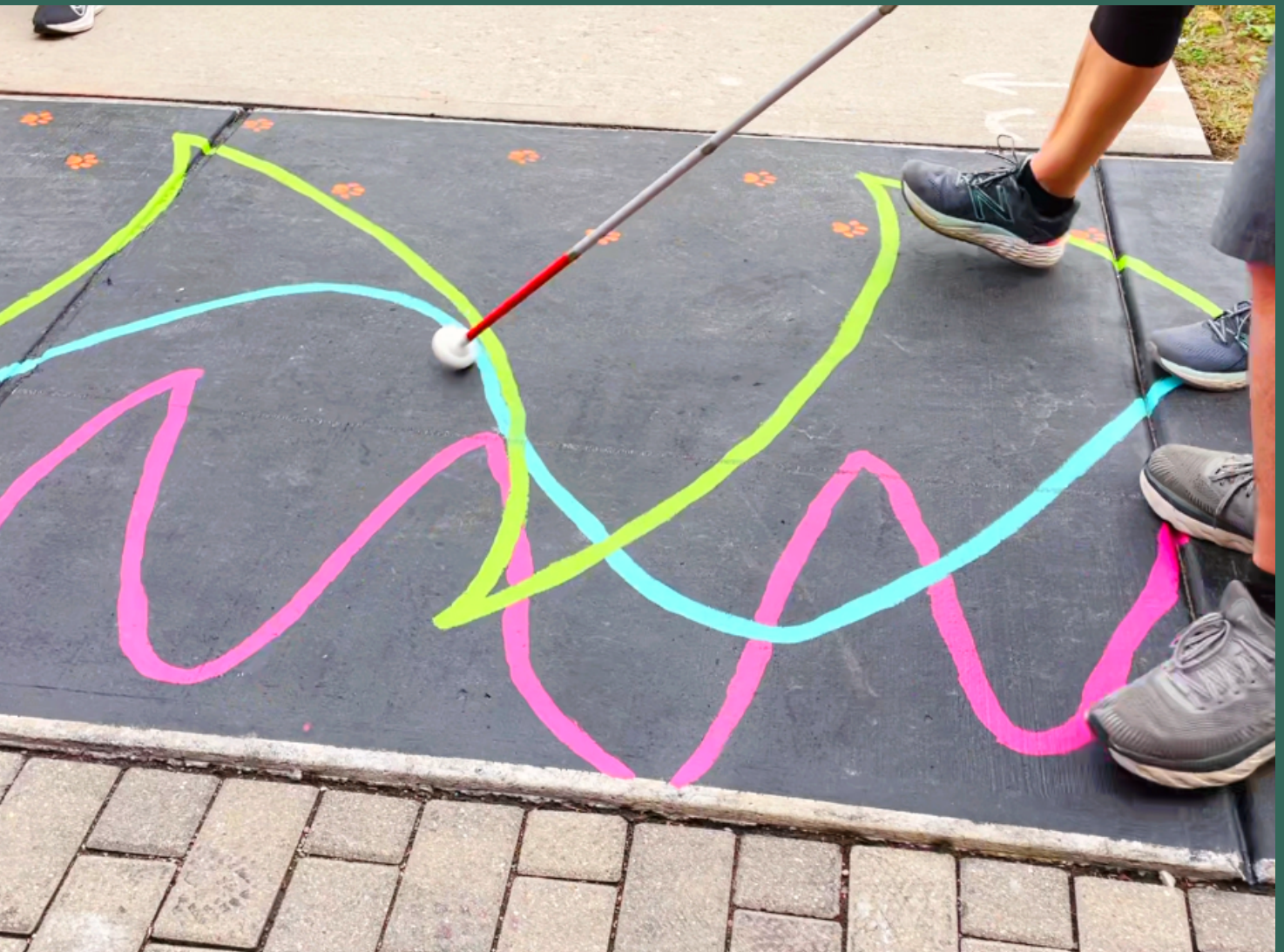
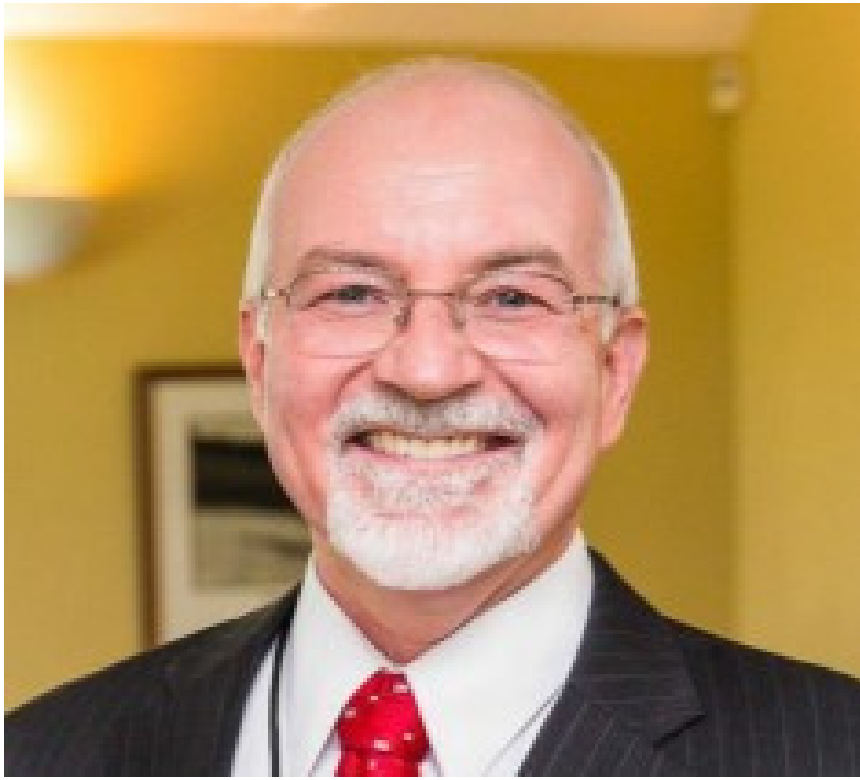


THE VERMONT ASSOCIATION FOR THE BLIND  
AND VISUALLY IMPAIRED

# ANNUAL REPORT FY21





**Over the last year, thanks to the flexibility and creativity of our staff, VABVI adapted to the challenges of the pandemic to ensure that our important support services were delivered safely and consistently. Our new referral system has enabled an increased number of people to more easily access our services. The pandemic underscored the importance of our SMART Device Training Program that helped users stay connected and feel less isolated. We engaged and collaborated within the community in many ways, such as working with ECHO and Seventh Generation on braille projects. We organized and led professional development workshops.**

**We became Zoom pros, and through Zoom we expanded the reach of our Tech Fair and PALS program. We expanded our online content, with new videos on YouTube, and created an online Vermont-focused interactive trivia game that featured contributions from a wide range of supporters from Sen. Sanders and Leahy to Grace Potter. We said goodbye to colleagues and welcomed new faces to the VABVI community. We couldn't have done this without your ongoing support and encouragement and our community partners. On behalf of all of our visually impaired neighbors- thank you!**

**STEVE POULIOT**

*Executive Director*

# Children Services

*Multiple Award Winner for excellence in services to children and adults.*

Children Services provided services to 327 students in FY21, ages 0-22. The year in highlights:

Staff: Alison Hampson and Jeanne Neu, students with the UMass TVI Program, began working full time with VABVI in August. Children Services staff has also hired Shelby Glass, COMS, and Kirsten Connelly, TVI/COMS. Children Services was fully staffed again as of September 2021!

UMass TVI Program: VABVI has three Vermonters enrolled, all of them were recruited into the program by VABVI. Two of the students have already started working full time with VABVI. The UMass Boston programs have been a lifeline for VABVI staffing in the Children and Adult Services Departments.



***Timeka uses the "Be My Eyes" app to decide which drink to buy.***

Babies Count: VABVI has joined the national Babies Count program, with Steph Carmichael, TVI/COMS and VABVI's Early Childhood Statewide Consultant, leading the VT effort.



Vermont is the 18th state to join the national program.

Sara Dessau, TVI/COMS and Intensive Special Needs Statewide Consultant, and Steph Carmichael organized the October 2021 workshop, "Trauma Informed Service Providing for Children with Multiple Impairments, Ages Birth to 7."

IRLE 2021: The Intensive Residential Life Experience camp was held in conjunction with the LEAP Program from June 21-30, 2021. 15 students learned skills in financial literacy, orientation and mobility, socialization, assistive technology, independent living, and self-determination.

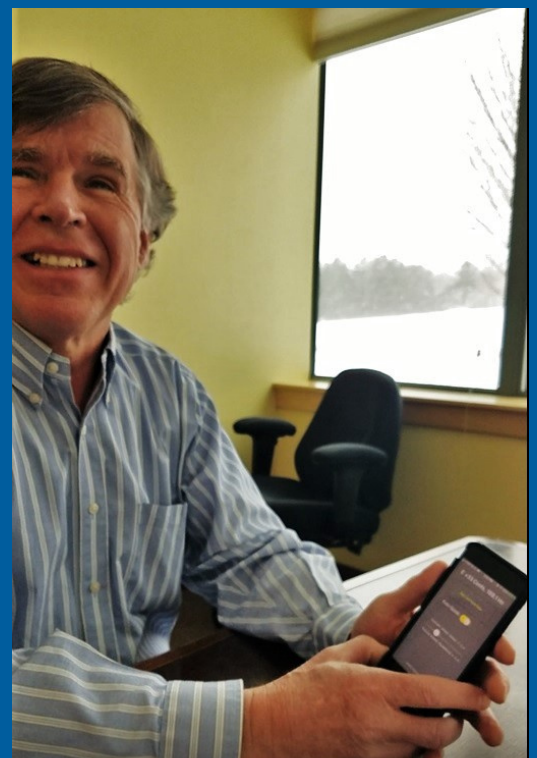
Summer Extended School Year Services (summer school); VABVI provided services to 43 students, twice as many as the previous year.



***Children Services adapted to the new challenges by utilizing Zoom meetings***

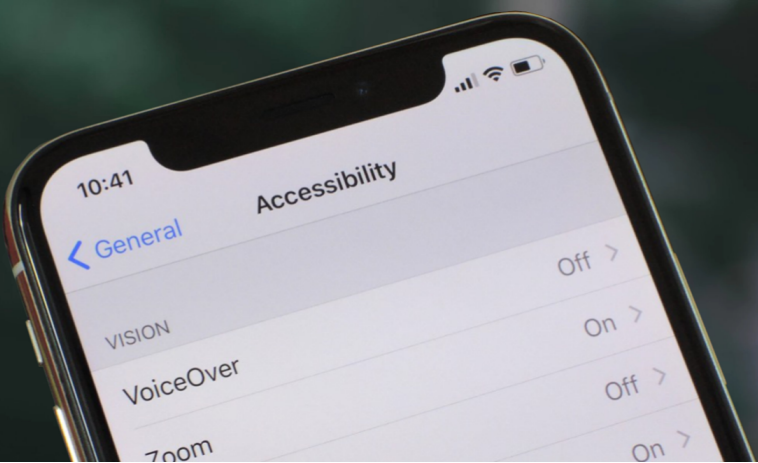
# Adult Services

Adult Services provided 1,249 services to clients in FY21. For many of our clients, 2021 was a difficult year. COVID-19 still remains a very serious threat to the predominantly senior population we serve. At the same time, the extreme isolation caused by social distancing measures impacts our clients in a profound way, furthering their disconnection from society as visually impaired individuals. Vision loss is a disability of access. This means access to information, one's environment, transportation and more. Many of our clients may be the only visually impaired person in their neighborhood, which is further emotionally isolating. In response, VABVI continues to ramp up our efforts to help our clients learn how to leverage telecommunications and assistive technology to not only stay connected, but thrive during difficult times. We call this specialized training, **SMART Training (Speech Magnification Access Reading Telecommunications)**.



This past year, VABVI has more than doubled the number of clients who received SMART services when compared to the same time frame two years ago. Many of the clients served have told their friends, and we specifically get calls now asking to help clients learn how to use their iPads, smart speakers, and video conference services.

Thanks to a temporary grant from the State of Vermont to address reducing social isolation, we have been able to take the necessary time to teach these skills, which takes significantly longer to learn if one has never used technology before.



In addition, we also have moved our regular in-person Peer Assisted Learning and Support Groups (PALS) to a virtual platform through Zoom. These groups focus on topics related to vision loss and help walk clients through the adjustment process related to visual impairment, much like the five stages of grief when you've lost a loved one.

As our clients had learned to access video conferencing systems, we also hosted an online Assistive Technology Fair through Zoom for our clients where we demonstrated and shared devices to help increase independence in the home and network with providers of assistive technology. The Fair allowed us to connect clients from across the state.



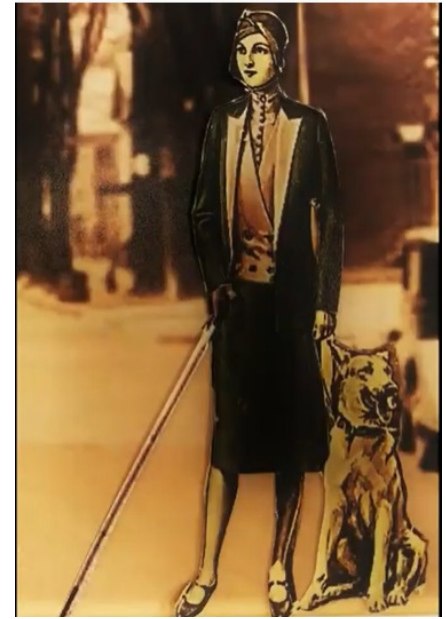
This demand for instruction in accessibility features will only increase as the baby boomer generation ages.

Seniors will need to know how to access online channels of communication with software adaptations and built-in features to operating systems. This means that VABVI will need to locate permanent funding necessary to provide the level of instruction necessary to learn these skills for our clients. The following example illustrates the life changing impact of our SMART services:

A woman in her late sixties had recently lost her sight due to diabetes. Our teachers worked with her to be able to fully access her smartphone. Using voice commands, she could dial her phone. The voice commands also allowed her to set calendar appointments. She is able to both read and dictate emails and text messages to her family, friends and doctors. She's able to set alarms and reminders when cooking or needing to take medications. While learning how to use a talking label wand in combination with the Seeing Ai app on her phone, she burst into tears because she was able to organize her skin care, hair care and other cosmetic products independently. She was scared to be alone, but knows now she can be independent and stay connected with others through the skills and technology she is learning.

# White Cane Awareness Day

White Cane Awareness Day could not be an in-person event in 2020, so we created a short documentary on Anne Connolly, the first person to use a white cane in Vermont. Anne was also the primary force in establishing VABVI as a state-wide organization. Anne was a blind teacher of the blind who was the sole representative of VABVI in the 1920s. She opened classes across the state, raised funds, raised awareness of vision impairment, was the first to bring a trained guide dog to Vermont, lobbied Montpelier for employment opportunities for the blind in Vermont, and created the first social group for visually impaired Vermonters; an early version of PALS. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7atls3IVaA8&t=111s>



**Through the winter and spring, we held weekly trivia nights over Zoom as a fun way to stay connected.**

## ZOOM PUB TRIVIA NIGHT

**This Week's Theme:  
Music of the 70s, 80s and 90s!**



## ZOOM PUB TRIVIA NIGHT

**This Week's Theme:  
Movies of the 80s, 90s and After!**



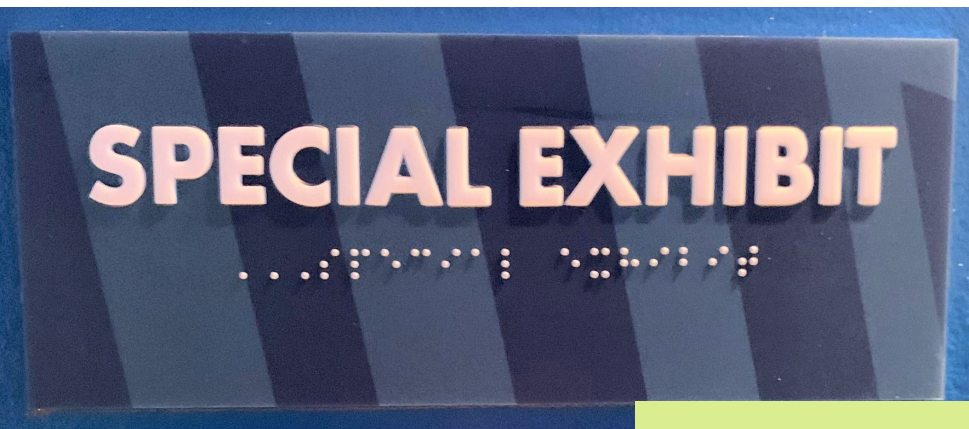


**"VABVI provides resources, training, and a confident voice of advocacy for my son.**

**They show him how to navigate successfully in a world that often overlooks people with visual impairments... VABVI has been there every step of the way; cheering him on, providing tools and technology to assist him, and helping him solve problems, often before a roadblock even arises. I'm grateful for VABVI's expertise, professionalism and compassion amidst so much uncertainty. "**

**-Parent of a VABVI Student**

# Community Collaborations



VABVI's Director of Children Services, Stephanie Bissonette, collaborated with the **Echo**, Leahy Center for Lake Champlain's Design Team in their efforts to add braille descriptions on their signage throughout the center. Braille is now included on signage that depicts restrooms, elevators, stairs, exits, and room names.

VABVI worked with designers at **Seventh Generation** to add braille to their products. The first products featuring braille on the packaging will be on the shelves by spring of 2022.





VABVI's Allie Fuddy, collaborated with design engineer Barry Hulce to help create Barry's LV Tablet Stand.

## Additional collaborations undertaken by Adult Services:

### **Veterans Administration in White River Junction**

The Veterans Administration requested that VABVI present at the VA's annual Disability Awareness Week for their staff. Dan Norris presented on "The Courtesy Rules for Working with People who are Blind or Visually Impaired."

### **VisionServe Alliance: Rehabilitation Services Outcome (RSO) Survey**

As a member of the VisionServe Alliance, VABVI dedicated time to help develop the RSO survey. The aim of the project is to produce evidence of the positive outcomes vision rehabilitation therapy, orientation and mobility, and low vision services have on the senior population. The project has finished its initial beta testing and is now waiting for a University to help move it through the Inter-rater Reliability (IRB) Process. Three universities are currently reviewing it.

### **OIB-TAC: Functional Independent Living Assessment (FILA)**

Dan Norris has been working with the Older Individuals with Blindness Technical Assistance Commission (OIB-TAC) to develop a standardized assessment for VRTs, which will better demonstrate results based outcomes for our services. VABVI is excited to help spearhead this effort for our clients and for services nationally.

### **Aging and Vision Loss Coalition (AVLNC)**

Several agencies and organizations who provide services to seniors with vision loss have come together in a national coalition calling themselves the Aging and Vision Loss Coalition. Their aim is to try to influence positive change on federal funding for Older Blind Services. Steve Pouliot and Dan Norris have joined that coalition and are regularly attending their Policy and Funding meetings.

## Advocacy Training

As a sub-committee of the Aging and Vision Loss Coalition, Dan Norris has joined with a group of five other professionals from various agencies serving the blind and visually impaired. The group is creating a series of modules to help train seniors to develop their own self-advocacy skills, as well as developing training to help these individuals advocate for vision services at the local, state and federal levels.

## Learn Earn and Prosper (LEAP)

Each year, our Vision Rehabilitation Therapies (CVRT) and Certified Orientation and Mobility Specialists (COMS) partner with the staff at LEAP to provide adaptive skills of daily living and travel to transition aged students with vision loss. In normal years, this happens in-person in the greater Burlington area. This past year, these services were provided remotely through Zoom. Our instructors worked with the LEAP staff to identify adaptive equipment for the kitchen, which was sent out in advance to the homes of participants. Then, instruction in how to use those devices was provided online. In addition to instruction in adaptive cooking, instruction was also provided for cleaning one's apartment and bathroom, and ways to plan routes in advance online. A special seminar was held to discuss the process a person goes through when adjusting to vision loss, as well as the process our friends and loved ones go through when we develop our vision loss, titled "Revealing Your Inner Superhero." This annual partnership has received national recognition for the positive outcomes it has facilitated in the lives of these transition students, and continues to be an important project that will continue for years to come.



Two LEAP students, Timeka and Abshiro, work at Cafe Overlook



THE GREAT  
**brave  
little  
state**  
CHALLENGE

When all public fundraising events were cancelled due to Covid, we created **The Great Brave Little State Challenge**. The online, family-friendly, interactive Vermont trivia quest includes collaborative contributions from Grace Potter, Mitch Wertlieb, Stephen Kiernan, Joe Citro, Charlie Nardozi, Fran Stoddard, former Governors Dean, Douglas and Kunin, Rep. Welch, Senators Leahy and Sanders, Tim Kavanaugh, Grace Potter, Chief Don Stevens, Amanda Thibault, Greg Worden, Tino Rutanhira, Tom Little, Lisa Lindahl, Natalie Kinsey, Greg Sanford, Greg Carpenter, Lt. Gov. David Zuckerman, Rusty DeWees, and Rep. Philip Baruth.



Where in Vermont can you discover the grave of an ancient Egyptian prince?

*Joe Citro*

This man had a plan.

What never arrived in 1816?

This woman is called the 'foremother of feminism', and was the first woman to

What geologic event formed the Green Mountains over 400 million years ago?

f the Calendar One site.

The skeleton of this, found in 1849, is the state fossil.

The bogs and wetlands of the Northeast Kingdom are said to be the best place to spot this animal

<https://www.vabvi.org/the-great-brave-little-state-challenge>

How many covered bridges are there in Vermont?

*Grace Potter*

Identify These!

**"VABVI taught me confidence."**

**Alek**

Former VABVI student

**"I live independently  
and for the last seven  
years (of work) I  
could not have done  
it without the help  
that I had from  
VABVI."**

Joe Guertin,  
retired  
Engineer

# \$500+ Level Donors

Mr. and Mrs. Gary Berian	Vermont Mutual Insurance
Mr. and Mrs. Andrew Bessy	Alma Gibbs Donchian Foundation
Mr. Robert Brinckerhoff	SCHIP
Mr. and Mrs. William Catto	Charitable Foundation of the Bryant
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Mr. and Mrs. James Pizzagalli	Walter Cerf Foundation
Mr. and Mrs. Steven Pouliot	Max and Victoria Dreyfus Foundation
Mr. and Mrs. Jeffrey Schroeder	
Mr. Raymond Sicotte	
Ms. Elizabeth Steele	
Mr. Douglas Stuart	
Ms. Hilaire Thomas	
Dr. and Mrs. Jeffery Young	

# Town & City Funding

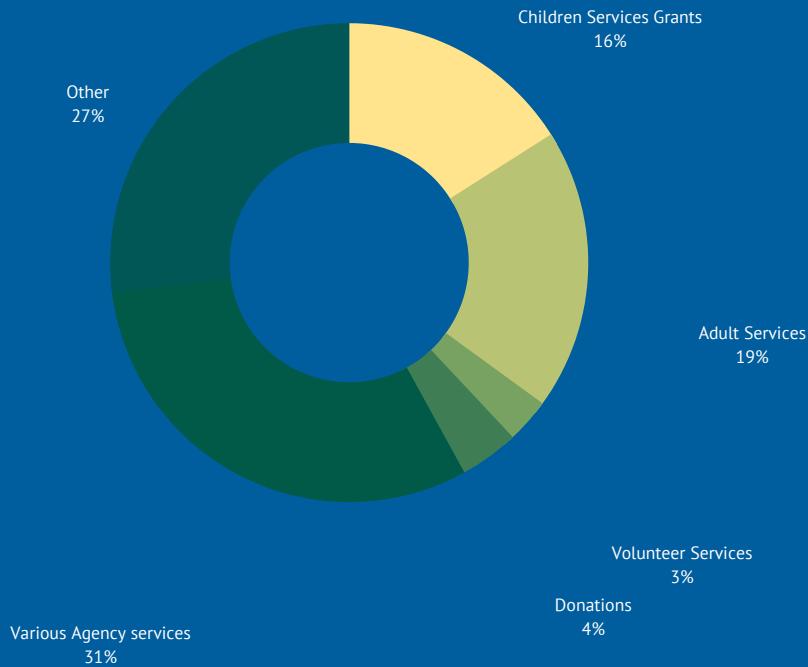
Albany  
Alburgh  
Arlington  
Barre City  
Berlin  
Bethel  
Bloomfield  
Brattleboro  
Bridport  
Brighton  
Brookline  
Cabot  
Calais  
Cambridge  
Castleton  
Charlotte  
Clarendon  
Craftsbury  
Danby  
East Montpelier  
Eden  
Fairfax  
Fairlee  
Fayston  
Glover  
Goshen  
Granville  
Guildhall  
Hartford  
Highgate  
Jay  
Lowell

Lunenburg  
Manchester  
Marshfield  
Middlesex  
Middletown Springs  
Montpelier City  
Moretown  
Mount Holly  
North Hero  
Northfield  
Pawlet  
Peacham  
Poultney  
Randolph  
Readsboro  
Richford  
Roxbury  
Royalton  
Shaftsbury  
Sharon  
Shelburne  
Sheldon  
St. Johnsbury  
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Tunbridge  
Underhill  
Waitsfield  
Waterbury  
Weathersfield  
Wells  
Weston  
Williston



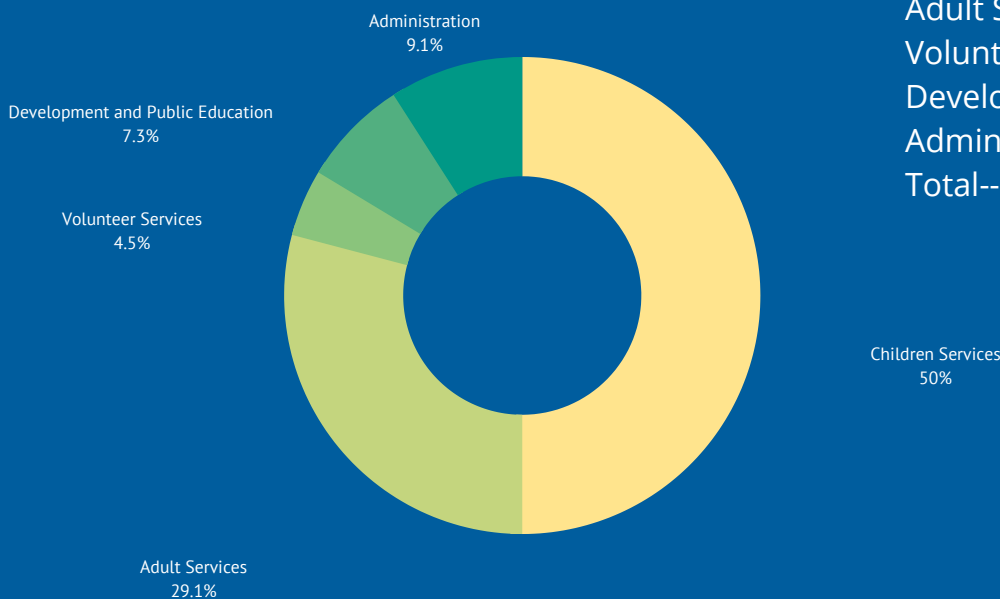
# FINANCIAL STATEMENT

## Revenue



Children Services-----	\$648,509
Adult Services-----	\$745,000
Volunteer Services-----	\$113,105
Donations-----	\$171,933
Various Agency Services-----	\$1,216,818
Other-----	\$1,097,316
<b>Total-----</b>	<b>\$3,992,681</b>

## Expenses



Children Services-----	\$1,633,337
Adult Services-----	\$970,454
Volunteer Services-----	\$147,791
Development-----	\$238,715
Admin-----	\$13,218
<b>Total-----</b>	<b>\$3,003,515</b>