

FRIENDS OF THE RIVER VALLEY

History:

The genesis of Friends of the River Valley (FRV) began in 2019 with founding board members Darby and John Beliveau's collective financial support to purchase a meal delivery van for RSU #10 addressing food insecurity and transportation challenges in the community.

In early 2021, Friends of River Valley officially formed as an organization, established its board of directors, and broadened the array of community programs it supports to address urgent social issues of this economically distressed region of Maine.

With the help of 75 early supporters, early initiatives included the purchase of a second, larger meal van for regional food delivery programs, underwriting education programs for the Rumford Children's Library, gifting of a three-story commercial building that houses the Oxford County Mental Health Services, and establishing The Margaret Beliveau Scholarship at The Hope Association.

Demographics of The Region:

The economic downturns in this region have contributed to an increase in physical and mental health problems, lack of education and professional opportunity, and deteriorating social vibrancy. In a **2018** health survey, **50%** of River Valley residents who responded did not have full-time jobs. **65.4%** of students in the local school district (RSU 10) are eligible for subsidized meals. **One in five** children (20.2%) in Oxford County live in poverty, and **24.8%** of students reported experiencing four or more ACES (Adverse Childhood Experiences).

Partnering for Solutions:

Since our official launch, Friends of the River Valley's goal has been to improve the lives of families and children in the region by addressing the deepest and most pressing needs. We partner with existing regional entities, provide them financial support, connect to funding streams and matching stimulus programs, and encourage coordinated efforts with other organizations.



Photo: Rumford Public Library



Photo: The Old School Food Pantry



Photo: ArtVan Student Art Projects

Our Signature Programs Include:

Meal Delivery Program:

With an Initial FRV investment of \$35,000 and partnering with RSU #10 and Full Plates, Full Potential, two vans were purchased for food delivery. **522,707** breakfasts and lunches were delivered to children and families from March 2020 to September 2021 during the difficult months of the pandemic. In the summer of 2022, the two vans delivered **1500** meals weekly to 8 River Valley sites.

Oxford County Mental Health Services:

A founding FRV board member donated a gift of a three-story commercial building valuing **\$126,000**, which houses the Oxford County Mental Health Services. OCMHS will shortly be federally accredited, allowing the organization to expand much-needed services for mental health issues, substance use disorders (SUD), and abuse. FRV is assisting in forming a matching fund program to hire and train SUD recovery coaches.

Artvan:

Artvan's mobile services help children cope with their ongoing trauma: "The therapeutic arts support building positive social skills, life skills, good decision-making, and resilience... Participating in Art Therapy provides a safe and tangible outlet for underlying thoughts and feelings."

FRV contributed **\$17,500** to providing art therapy to alternative school students enrolled due to parental/generations neglect and abuse and who are removed from the public school to address issues related to their psychological difficulties.

In the first half of 2022, over **40 sessions** at the Western Foothills Regional Program and Meroby Schools served over **25** children and teens, and a teacher self-care workshop helped 7 participants. Summer Art at Strathglass Park hosted **20-25** children for **8 weekly sessions**.

Rumford Public Library:

During challenging economic times, the library serves as a summer meal site, a year-round healthy snack location for children, a day refuge for the elderly and homeless, and an introduction to the world of reading and computers for children and their families.

FRV contributed **\$17,500** to fund learning and enrichment offerings and STEAM programs geared towards stimulating interest in the sciences. Dozens of these programs involved **hundreds** of children together with parents.

Team Long Run:

FRV partnered with Team Long Run, an early intervention literacy and exercise program, to help fulfill its mission as an organization that uses school "active play and reading to give kids living in rural communities a brighter future."

FRV donated **\$5,000** and a board member an additional **\$2,500** for reading materials, Head Start programs, the brown bag program, which gives books for children to start their home library, and exercise/play activities such as "Sizzle and Pop." These programs served **536** children.

Old School Food Pantry:

After the primary community food pantry in the community closed its doors, FRV partnered with River Valley Healthy Communities Coalition (RVHCC) and Holy Savior Parish to open a food pantry in the centrally located former St. John's School. To date, FRV gave a total of **\$20,000** to launch this initiative, **\$10,000** for a new boiler and **\$10,000** for start-up costs and the first year's rent. OSFP now serves over **50** families weekly.

Other Organizations Supported by Friends of the River Valley:

Western Foothills Kids Association (WFKA):



- WFKA Winter Clothing: Working with RSU#10, FRV contributed **\$3,000** to Rumford and Meroby elementary schools and **\$1,000** to Dirigo elementary school. A total of **300** students received much-needed warm winter clothing.
- WFKA Summer Camp: In the summer of 2020, FRV contributed **\$3,200** to provide **20 scholarships** for financially needy students to attend four weeks of enrichment summer camp.

Additionally, an FRV board member contributed **\$5,000** to WFKA to help support future activities and programs, providing much-needed financial assistance.

Larry Labonte Recovery Center:

LLRC provides referrals for detox centers and recovery housing and information regarding AA, AL-ANON, and SMART recovery programs. LLRC center works closely with FRV-supported Oxford County Mental Health Services in recovery coach training, treatment, recovery housing, and after-hours meeting space. FRV support is used for operating expenses.

Greater Rumford Community Center:

FRV has provided financial support for heating costs for this multi-generational vital institution. Board members have also contributed personally to keeping this iconic institution open.

Scouting Now:

FRV support for Pine Tree Council Troop #2580 to be able to keep 10-18-year-old boys and girls in the scouting programs.

FRV is looking forward to 2023. We are conducting extensive research with surveys targeting community needs. This comprehensive assessment will help FRV create strategic plans for expanding programming to potentially address economic development, substance abuse disorder (SUD), mental health, and homelessness. We will continue to support and expand existing programs.

We want to express our deep gratitude to our donors and corporate sponsors' ongoing generosity for making our programs' successful outcomes possible. You are improving the lives of children and families with the greatest needs in the River Valley. Thank you.

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