

2024 ANNUAL REPORT

FRIENDS ^{OF} THE RIVER VALLEY



Letter From the President

Dear Friend:

For our organization, 2024 was a year of resilience, marked by challenges, growth opportunities, and a steadfast commitment to the River Valley communities.

Friends of the River Valley started the year by responding to the community's immediate needs. The devastating floods in mid-December 2023 prompted our immediate and robust response. We donated funds to help equip responders to this crisis. This response was vital in supporting our community during that challenging time.

We continued broadening support for foundational programming, empowering it to expand its reach and impact into area schools and address our communities' substance abuse disorders.

Programs championing healthy lifestyle opportunities and accessibility for Area Youth and Families are critical to our mission. We are proud to have successfully funded new programs, ensuring our youth have valuable recreational opportunities and a brighter future.

Internally, Friends of the River Valley set goals for driving organizational growth: We are aggressively developing our organization by building our internal structures, improving our operational framework, and educating ourselves with outside consultation. Launching an endowment fund to ensure the perpetuity of our ability to fund community programming and significantly grow our donor base is at the top of our priorities.

FRV continues to be a driving force in our community, collaborating with business leaders, town managers, external business interests, and community organizations. Our joint efforts have led to significant growth and development opportunities in our area.

Friends of the River Valley welcomes two new valuable members to its board, whose expertise and dedication will significantly enhance our leadership.

Acknowledgments

Design Courtesy of
Preti Flaherty

A special thank you to
Stewart Smith Photography
for his incredible work

Board of Directors

Matthew Kaubris, President
Darby Beliveau, President
Cheryl A. G. Dickson, Secretary
John S. Beliveau, Treasurer
Lisa Poulin Marr
Nghia Ha
John Pepin
Jeanne LaPointe
Dr. Charles C. Swan, II

Contact Us:

Friends of the River Valley
PO Box 175
Rumford, ME 04276-0175
Info@friendsofrivervalley.org

Jeanne LaPointe, RSU 10 Nutrition Director, is a lifelong community member. She brings her knowledge of the River Valley's needs and 40-year career with vast first-hand nutrition and food delivery experience to the River Valley's food-insecure children and families.

Dr. Charles C. Swan, II, traveled extensively and returned to Dixfield in 2007 as Assistant Principal/athletic director at Dirigo High School. He soon became the **principal of Dirigo Elementary School**, where he has since served in that position. In 2024, Charles was named **Maine's National Distinguished Principal of the Year**. He brings invaluable experience in education, involvement, children's needs, and knowledge of the communities to our board.

Since our origin, we have expanded ideas that have improved and refined our mission, informed by our growing relationships in the community with stakeholders and partnerships; the effects have taken shape after four years in the River Valley. We will continue to take decisive action to collaborate with schools to enhance and improve education in our area. Our efforts will focus on supporting robust educational enrichment programs. We will continue tackling food insecurity and promoting healthy lifestyles for children and families to create a more hopeful tomorrow.

Thanks to the generous support of donors like you, we are making real and lasting improvements in the River Valley. ***One hundred percent of your contributions go directly to our grantees' programs and projects.*** You have been instrumental in our success, and we are deeply grateful for your continued support.

Sincerely,



Darby Beliveau, President

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Mission

Friends of the River Valley serves as a centralized resource for supporting and promoting a range of nutrition, education, health, social services, and economic development across the River Valley.



2024 Highlights:

Responding to Community Crisis:

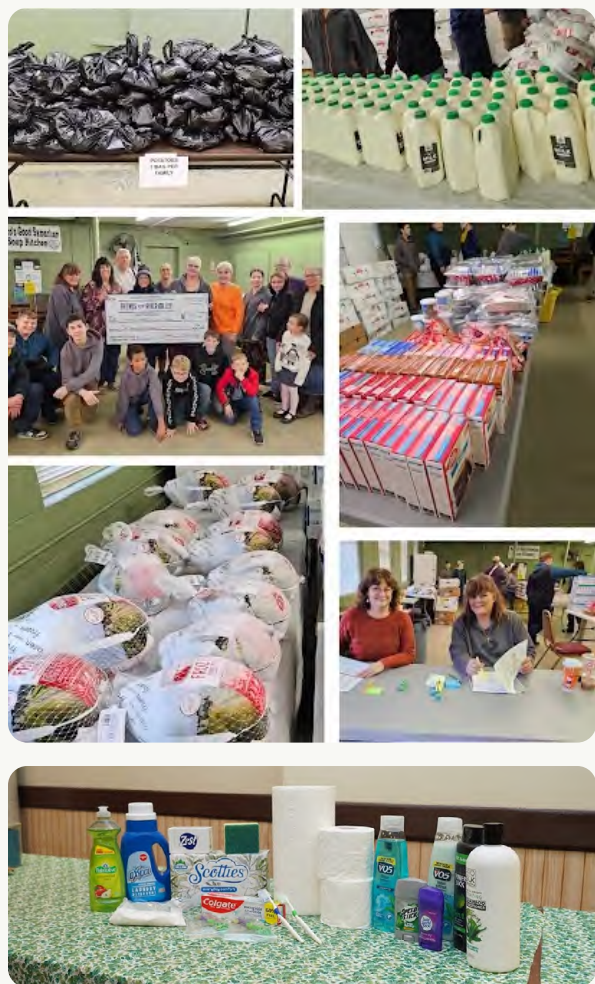
A catastrophic flood in December 2023 severely impacted the River Valley, causing significant damage and disruption. As a centralized funding organization and seeing the deep needs arising from the crisis, we were uniquely positioned to provide immediate funding for recovery equipment, necessary resources, and food for the victims impacted. Friends of the River Valley donated \$7,000 to important organizations in the community that provide essential and reliable resources to community members: Old School Food Pantry, Envision Rumford, the Rumford Fire Department, and the Mexico Fire Department were critical entities assisting in the emergency relief efforts for the River Valley's citizens.



Providing Food and Essential Needs to the Economically Disadvantaged:

The River Valley is home to many economically disadvantaged citizens:

- As of 2022, **14.4% of people** in Oxford County live in poverty.
- **75% of students** in RSU10 are need eligible for free lunches



With the generosity of our donors, we continue to be actively engaged in the fight against food insecurity and addressing the profound needs of our community members. Our ongoing efforts are a testament to our commitment to addressing these pressing issues.

- \$3,500 assisted The Mexico Good Samaritan Soup Kitchen in their efforts of feeding and providing community connection to 80 to 100 children and families in the summer and assisted in the Thanksgiving Box Giveaway and Thanksgiving Day Community Free Meals.
- \$3,000 donated to St. Barnabas provided the bulk of essential needs (toiletries, paper goods, and home care products) to those who could not afford them. They consistently serve 38 households 12 times a year.
- RSU 10 Food Van delivered 750 vital meals to children and families during non-school periods and assisted local food pantries with food delivery services.
- \$2,000 donated to Dixfield Discount Fuel Toy Drive provided 300 children with wish list items, some of which included winter essentials like coats, hats, gloves, snow pants, and boots.

Addressing Substance Use Disorders:

According to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Administration, nationally, over eight million children under 18 live with at least one adult with a substance use disorder (SUD), which affects more than one in 10 children. Most of these children are under age 5. Families with SUDs show patterns that harm child development and increase the risk of emotional, behavioral, or substance use issues. SUDs create chaos and financial and emotional instability in the home, leading to long-term adverse effects on children.

(Lipari, R. N., & Van Horn, S. L. (2017). *Children living with parents who have a substance use disorder*. https://www.samhsa.gov/data/sites/default/files/report_3223/ShortReport-3223.html.)



The Larry Labonte Recovery Center (LLRC) provides a vital service to the River Valley. LLRC supports individuals recovering from substance use disorders by offering peer support, recovery coaching, workshops, and treatment referrals in a safe environment. They collaborate with local agencies for mental health services, housing assistance, and employment resources. The Student Recovery Coach Program (SRCP) provides one-on-one support in school, helping students develop coping strategies and improve their overall well-being and academic success.

A \$4,000 grant helped to provide:

- Services to 2,706 recipients
- Student Recovery Coach Programming (SRCP) with 248 recovery coaching sessions (a 17% increase from 2023) that provided one-on-one school support, educating and guiding students and helping them develop coping strategies and improve their overall well-being and academic success: This involved 6 area schools: Dirigo High School, Dirigo Middle School, MVHS/and Alternative School, Mountain Valley Middle School/ and Alternative School students
- Sessions in the community, with an average monthly contact of 30 individuals, connecting them to resources and services, creating hope and pathways to better lives for all those impacted.

“Over the past year, Friends of the River Valley’s support has contributed to a meaningful growth and positive change within our community. Thanks to The Friends of The River Valley generous donations, we’ve been able to expand our programs and services, making an even greater impact in the lives of those we serve.” - Kathie William LLRC

Creating Access to Healthy Recreation and Wellness:

Donations have a direct impact on economically disadvantaged children. Without these contributions, these children would lack access to healthy recreational opportunities. Such activities create pathways for new experiences, enhance lifestyles, and develop skills to improve their lives significantly.



- Mountain Valley High School Outing Club: \$5,000 to the MVHS Outing Club enabled area youth to enjoy exciting outdoor spring and summer adventures. The purchase of fuel to go to the Forks in Maine, Northern NH, and Northeast VT, food for whitewater rafting trips, a week of canoeing, and replacement and purchase of essential equipment made these trips possible. All the students involved had never attended a summer camp; these activities, being their only ventures into the outdoors with other students, were truly unique, and the feedback was overwhelmingly positive!
- McGouldrick Park: A \$1,000 grant helped develop a neglected Dixfield park, providing hundreds of residents with a green recreation space.
- The Black Mountain of Maine Need to Ski Program: This grant, sponsored with \$5,000, provided needy children the opportunity to ski. This initiative includes free lessons, rentals, and ski passes for the winter, demonstrating the value of the sponsored programs.
- Area Youth football \$1,500: provided equipment and free access to area children wanting to participate in the sport.
- Town of Mexico July 4th Celebration: A \$1,000 grant provided free of charge for the 4th of July activities to an estimated 300-350 children.



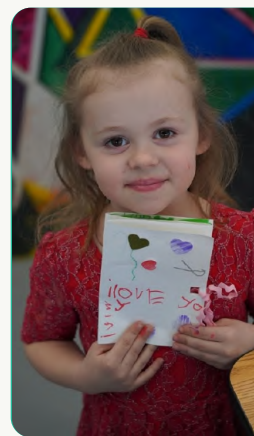
Continuing Commitment and Building upon Four Years of Important Programming:

Since our partnerships began in 2021, **Team Long Run** and **ArtVan** have implemented efficacious programs and made a meaningful impact on children in the River Valley communities.

Team Long Run (TLR) stands out for its unique approach, providing educational enrichment through curriculum-compatible book delivery programs and in-class attentional improvement exercises through the Sizzle and Pop program. \$10,000 funded these programs, customized in their focus on improving early literacy at the Chisholm Head Start, Rumford Elementary School, Meroby Elementary, and Dixfield Elementary School, have had significant impacts:

- Preschool children with books in the home are better prepared for kindergarten.
- The movement in class settings through Sizzle and Pop not only helps students improve their health and focus but also reassures us about the effectiveness of our programs in promoting a healthy learning environment.
- Since 2021, this program has helped children build their in-home libraries from year to year, and in some homes, these are the only books available.

In 2024 alone, TLR delivered 1,560 to 940 children from 1-12 years old.



"If it were not for Team Long Run and their generous donors, the majority of my students would never get to know what it's like to have books to read at home with their families." - Jodi Ellis, Principal

Artvan provides therapeutic art services to help children experiencing adverse childhood experiences manage trauma and complicated feelings of anxiety, sadness, and anger. Through \$20,000 of funding, Artvan made 800 visits to the River Valley area. In 2024, Artvan conducted programming at Western Foothills Regional Program and Mountain Valley Middle School and complementary summer art programs for children and caregivers at the Rumford Public Library and Strathglass Park. The continuity of therapeutic programs and the ongoing presence of Artvans' skilled professionals since 2021 have created trust and feelings of safety among hundreds of youth in the area. This consistency enhances the ability to grapple with complex events present in so many of the children's lives:

"During this year, we learned the importance of responsive action and care based on community needs. The drastic weather conditions and flooding lead staff to specifically aim to provide safe ways to express feelings such as loss, fear, anger, confusion, and all emotions relating to these events and what past traumas these events may have activated." - Artvan Therapist

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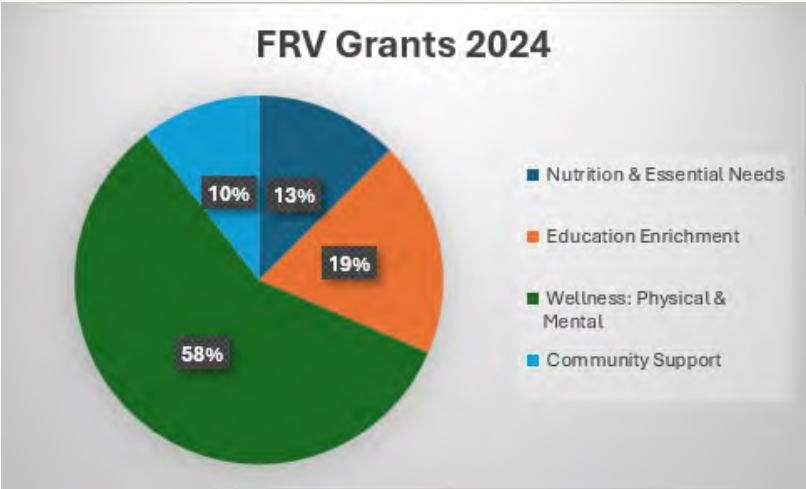
Advancing Economic Development Opportunities:

In 2024, Friends of the River Valley continued its commitment to strategize, collaborate with, and support community leaders and stakeholders to augment the area’s economic viability.

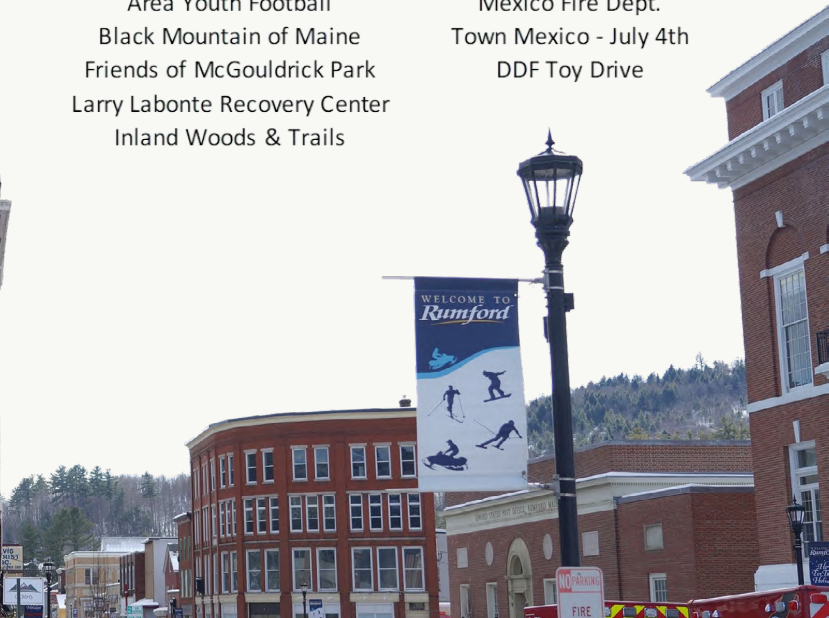
A \$5,000 grant will help to develop trails and enhance outdoor recreation in the Rumford Community Forest (RCF). Inland Woods and Trails aims to create a multi-use, four-season trail network in Oxford County, promoting economic growth and healthy lifestyles while preserving the area’s natural beauty. With over 100 miles of trails for hiking, mountain biking, and snowshoeing, RCF connects Black Mountain of Maine and Mountain Valley High School to downtown. This project will improve access for residents and strengthen community ties, boosting the area’s appeal as an outdoor destination and stimulating economic growth.



Our board members, acting as advocates and liaisons, have been instrumental in advancing the development of daycare centers. We have partnered with community stakeholders and the Lewiston Auburn YMCA to establish a federally approved daycare center in downtown Rumford. Significantly, we are also assisting in planning an additional center, which promises to enrich our community further. These affordable daycare centers provide families the support they need to improve their financial status and create job opportunities.



Nutrition & Essential Needs	Education Enrichment	Wellness: Physical & Mental	Community Support
Old School Food Pantry	Team Long Run	ArtVan	Rumford Fire Dept.
Mexico Good Samaritan Soup Kitchen	Rumford Children's Library	MVHS Outing Club	Envision Rumford
St. Barnabus Food Pantry		Area Youth Football	Mexico Fire Dept.
		Black Mountain of Maine	Town Mexico - July 4th
		Friends of McGouldrick Park	DDF Toy Drive
		Larry Labonte Recovery Center	
		Inland Woods & Trails	



Growth in Organizational Development and Fundraising:

2024 was a year of tremendous organizational growth.

John Beliveau, Friends of the River Valley Treasurer, reports:

“The FRV board takes its fiduciary and governance responsibilities seriously. Since its founding in 2021, the FRV board members have completely covered the organization’s overhead costs so that 100% of donor funds go directly to supporting programs in our communities. In each year of our existence, FRV has planned for an operating surplus, allowing us to build up a reserve fund to ensure that we can continue to fund programs over the succeeding twelve months. Looking longer term, FRV initiated in 2024 a multi-year capital campaign to build up a \$2 million endowment so that we can continue providing financial support in perpetuity. Funds will

be drawn from the endowment to supplement our annual fund, allowing us to expand our program support. We are pleased to report that we are already at 25% of our goal.”

In 2024, Friends of the River Valley continued to grow and improve organizational functions and impact through board education, expanded partnerships with stakeholders and donor base, improved name recognition, and added impressive and influential board membership from within the community.

We want to thank our donors for making this all possible. Our partnership will continue to improve the lives of children and families in the River Valley!

IMPACT 2024 | BY THE NUMBERS

\$103,392

ANNUAL FUND DONATIONS

\$260,440

ENDOWMENT DONATIONS

\$71,493

AMOUNT GRANTED

\$16,388

OPERATING EXPENSES

97

NUMBER OF DONORS

17

ORGANIZATIONS SUPPORTED