New program connects those in need with assistance

By Tom Ayres
Senior Staff Writer

The HUB, a new program operating under the auspices of the Woodstock Community Trust and the Ottauquechee Health Foundation, will serve as a central point of contact for people facing financial crises in seven communities in the region.

"The HUB grew out of the very successful efforts of WARF — the Woodstock Area Relief Fund — that emerged during the COVID pandemic," commented Denise Lyons of Woodstock, one of the lead organizers of the new initiative, during a Monday phone conversation. "And WARF, in a sense, built on the more informal but still highly successful efforts of local communities collaborating after Tropical Storm Irene. We asked ourselves how we could make this a more permanent organization and make it as efficient and collaborative as possible."

The HUB effort brings together community service organizations and volunteers in Barnard, Bridgewater, Killington, Plymouth, Pomfret, Reading, and Woodstock into one mutual aid network that serves as a conduit for people needing help with utility bills, medical expenses, food insecurity, car payments, home repairs, and other financial needs, Lyons noted.

"There are nearly 30 stakeholders representing service providers such as the Thompson Senior Center and Senior Solutions, as well as the various funding sources in all of our towns, such as Barnard Helping Hands, the Plymouth Memory Tree, and the Faulkner Fund in Woodstock," The HUB community organizer explained.

"We're very aware of the kinds of crises that our neighbors were experiencing during the pandemic and that many people face those kinds of events in the course of their ordinary, daily lives as well – situations such as divorce, job loss, family illness, or simply financial stress," Lyons noted. The multitown program was inspired and informed by the mutual aid networks that sprouted across Vermont during the pandemic, such as RAMAN, the Randolph Area Mutual Aid Network that serves people in crisis in the communities of Randolph, Braintree, and Brookfield in Orange County.

"The HUB has a whole array of resources," Lyons offered. "We've trained community volunteer advocates – we call them case advocates — so that when someone calls The HUB or fills out an application online, they're connected to a volunteer who's really plugged into all of the resources and can help connect that person with whatever they need." The goal, Lyons added, is to reduce redundancies in offering crisis assistance by providing a streamlined point of contact for people in need.

"An added benefit is that we are putting a lot of emphasis on confidentiality," The HUB spokesperson continued. "Sometimes people living in a small town don't want to contact that town's funding organization or source out of concern for their privacy. They think, 'I don't want everybody in town to know about my problems.' The HUB offers anonymity for people who want to connect with a local funding source with protection for their identity."

Perusal of the support application form on The Hub website confirms Lyons' assertion: residents of Barnard, for example, can connect confidentially with Barnard Helping Hands through the application. The same is true for Plymouth residents and the Plymouth Memory Tree funding source, and for Woodstock residents and the Faulkner Fund, which was established in 1959 from a bequest in the will of Marian G. Faulkner to the American Red Cross to "help in the care of needy and deserving persons living in Woodstock."

People in the four other communities served by the newly formed HUB effort, including residents of Bridgewater, Killington, Pomfret, and Reading, can choose to be connected confidentially with other regional service organizations that are part of the collaborative aid network, including the King's Daughters and Sons, Pivotal Steps, and the Ottauquechee Health Foundation.

There are four ways for people in financial need to connect with The HUB and its affiliated services for support. Interested parties can complete an online application at apply.thehubneighbors.org/form or they can seek help via email at apply@thehubneighbors.org. The HUB also has a dedicated, volunteer-run help line at (802) 457-7214. And lastly, individuals and families in need can pick up an application form for The HUB support outside the Ottauquechee Health Foundation office at Simmons House at 30 Pleasant Street in Woodstock.

EDC to consider child care grant requests Dec. 15

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