

Promise Community Application for Bellows Falls

Promise Community Application Cover Sheet

Attachment 1 Coversheet

Person to contact with questions about this application:

Name of contact person: **Barbara Ternes** Title: **Executive Director**

Telephone: **(802) 463 – 9927** Email: babrt@parksplacevt.org

Organization/agency/school submitting application

Name of Organization/Agency: **Parks Place (A Community Resource Center)**

Address: **44 School Street**

City: **Bellows Falls** Zip code: **05101**

Name of Executive Director/ President/ CEO/ Superintendent: **Barbara Ternes**

County: **Windham**

Agency of Human Service District: **Springfield**

Targeted School District/ Supervisory Union: **Windham Northeast Supervisory Union**

Targeted School(s): **Central Elementary School and the WNESU Pre-school at Cherry Hill**

Building Bright Futures Regional Coordinator: **Chad Simmons**

Sponsor:

Building Bright Futures Regional Coordinator or Agency of Human Services Field Director

Name: **Chad Simmons** Email: csimmons@buildingbrightfutures.org

The following checklist is to help you prepare your Promise Community application.

Attachment 1 Application Coversheet

Attachment 2 Pledge of Commitment and Signatures- mail hard copy

Narrative on your community needs, will and impact

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A. COMMUNITY NEED AND PROFILE

The *Village of Bellows Falls* is located in the town of Rockingham. It has long been an industrial and railroad center. The town experienced its most intensive development during the last third of the nineteenth century when the papermaking industry expanded rapidly to become the predominant economic force in Bellows Falls. Since then, economic development has been stagnant and the town has struggled to revive its economy and social identity. Bellows Falls is the geographical focus of the Promise Community Application and is located between the Agency of Human Service (AHS) District's of Brattleboro and Springfield. The Central Elementary School and the Pre-School at Cherry Hill are both operated by Windham Northeast Supervisory Union (WNESU) and are the primary population targets within the Bellows Falls geographic region. Based on current preschool enrollment and population data, there are an estimated 222 children between the ages of 0-6 year old living in Bellows Falls as of March 2015.

Required Data Points for Promise Community Application

Free & Reduced lunch data for Central Elementary School: **67.2%**

Kindergarten Readiness Scores for WNESU: **57.80%**

WNESU Third grade reading scores: **68.75%**

Childcare programs with 4 or 5 stars (highest ratings): **40%**

In 2012 Central Elementary School conducted a survey collecting statistics about families with students attending their school. Based on 200 students at the school, they discovered 3 or more stressors affected 21% of families.

| | |
|-------------------|----------|
| Substance Abuse | 22% (44) |
| Domestic Violence | 27% (54) |
| Jail/Prison Time | 16% (31) |
| Unemployment | 29% (58) |
| Mental Illness | 24% (47) |
| Death of a Parent | 2% (4) |
| Foster Care | 4% (8) |
| Homelessness | 1% (2) |
| Deployed Parent | 1% (2) |

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Poverty Rates: The median household income for residents in the Town of Rockingham is at \$38,269, significantly lower than both the Windham County median household income of \$51,113 and the State median household income of \$54,168. According to the American Census Survey, (ACS) data, over 60% of children ages 0 to 17 are below 200%. The overall poverty rate of Bellows Falls is at 21% of the population. Combined with a 15.1% rate of Bellows Falls residents without a HS diploma, this meets the CDC’s definition of a “vulnerable population.”

Access to Quality Childcare and Early Childhood Programs: Despite a clear need to improve Kindergarten readiness, access to high quality programs is limited in the region with only 40% of the licensed centers achieving a 4 or 5 star rating.

| Towns in the Windham Northeast Supervisory Union (WNESU) | Number of Programs | Capacity | Openings | Vacancy Rate % |
|--|--------------------|----------|----------|----------------|
| Athens | 1 | 15 | 0 | 0 |
| Grafton | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Rockingham | 10 | 172 | 26 | 15% |
| Westminster | 5 | 139 | 24 | 17% |

Within the Town of Rockingham 23% of the pre-school/child care slots are rated at 5 Stars. A full breakdown of STAR ratings within Rockingham is listed in the chart below.

| Pre-K Vacancy Rate for Rockingham ONLY | Number of Programs | Capacity | Openings | Vacancy Rate % |
|--|--------------------|----------|----------|----------------|
| 1 STAR | 1 | 10 | 10 | 100% |
| 2 STAR | 1 | 10 | 0 | 0% |
| 3 STAR | 1 | 10 | 0 | 0% |
| 4 STAR | 3 | 70 | 9 | 13% |
| 5 STAR | 2 | 40 | 0 | 0% |
| NO RATING | 2 | 32 | 7 | 22% |
| TOTALS | 10 | 172 | 26 | 15% |

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Indicators of Academic Achievement: Indicators of educational achievement show great need among the student population. Kindergarten readiness scores for children entering the Windham Northeast Supervisory Union (WNESU) are at 57.8%. Third grade achievement levels for students in WNESU is at 68.75%. School officials state that indicators get worse, not better, as students progress in grade level. At 77.11%, the 4 –year co-hort graduation rates for high school students in Bellows Falls are lower than the statewide average of 86.6%. Graduation rates of students from Bellows Falls is at 88.75%, below the statewide average of 92.48%.

Health Indicators: System-based issues within AHS affect the health of children in Bellows Falls and the surrounding areas. Accessibility of health care and other essential services is limited due to the geographical location of Rockingham and the fact the Bellows Falls is divided between two AHS districts. There is also a high prevalence of substance abuse and misuse according to data from the local Youth Risk Behavior Survey from 2013. The survey revealed the following statistics on the concerning trends among area youth: 1) Alcohol: 29% of 12th graders reported binge drinking in the last month 2) Suicide Rates: 37% of middle school girls seriously considered suicide versus 22% statewide 3) Marijuana: 16% of 7th graders tried it versus 5% statewide 4) Prescription Drug Abuse: 29% of high school seniors have reported misuse of prescription drugs.

Food Insecurity: Food Insecurity is defined by the USDA as, “ Limited or uncertain availability of nutritionally adequate and safe food.” There is limited access to healthy food outlets in the town of Rockingham. 70% of people served by our Place Drop-in Center, a local food pantry, are from Bellows Falls. Greater Falls Connections, in partnership with other local organizations, conducted a survey in 2013 on access to healthy foods in Bellows Falls. Among other findings in the survey, families with children who responded reported that it is “sometimes true” that in the past twelve months they: 1) relied on only a few kinds of low-cost food to feed the children because they were running out of money; 2) could not feed the children a well-balanced meal because they could not afford it.

B. COMMUNITY STORY ON HIGH NEEDS CHILDREN

The students who come to Central Elementary School face a variety of challenges in their home lives. The startling free and reduced lunch rate of 67.2% is just one metric

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that hints at the variety of factors that impact the students. Beyond the free and reduced lunch indicator, there is a high number of children with parents who are incarcerated, with 30 parents incarcerated in the 2013 – 2014 school year among roughly a 168 student body. Many of these incarcerations are related to substance abuse. There are students who are no longer in the care of their biological parents and who are placed in temporary guardianship. They are students who do not have a consistent home for shelter and instead bunk in with family friends. While these students grow up too quickly, often learning to advocate for themselves before they can write their name, they are also growing up without their basic needs being met. It is no wonder that our students see their school as a safe-haven.

The WNESU's Early Education Home to School Liaison tells the story of one of the families she works with in the paragraph below. This type of case is typical, and in the majority, not minority, among the families served in Central Elementary School, and within the geographic area of Bellows Falls.

"This is a single mom, father is incarcerated. Mom was raised in DCF custody along with 2 of her 5 siblings. Her oldest brother is currently serving time for the murder of his infant daughter. This mom has 2 children ages 3 and almost 5. When the older child started Head Start at the age of 3 he had a 2-word vocabulary. Both children are still in diapers and the older child who is headed to Kindergarten in the fall will probably attend in a pull-up diaper. This winter they ran out fuel and had no heat at least 3 times. During this time, even though she tried to keep the pipes from freezing with a small space heater, the kitchen pipes froze and burst. The water flooded her kitchen floor and because it is not up to code the water poured into the downstairs apartment that caused that part of the ceiling to collapse. The water and ceiling have not been fixed. Right now she does her dishes in the bathtub. The ice hanging from her roof was so bad this year that mail and trash pickup services were suspended. When the ice fell this week, it took out a window. Her landlord lives in NY State and is not an attentive landlord. The floors in both her kitchen and bathroom do not meet code, and this year DCF got beds for the children who had been sleeping on a mattress on the floor. Tax bills and water bills have not been paid so the water to her apartment is in jeopardy of being shut off next month. She owns no furniture except for beds and a table with 2 chairs. We have been working with her to get another place to live, but the choices and household income make this very challenging. Also the choices will be further limited when dad gets out of jail and rejoins the household due to his felony record. This leaves mom with

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no resources for meeting their basic needs let alone improving their quality of life as she wants dad to come and live with her. Mom has limited skills and receives Reach-up Assistance, her main source of income. She counts on WIC for food, and struggles to do laundry and food shopping because she must be able to carry everything in her child's stroller. The stroller is the only transportation she has. DCF has an open case with the family and mom gets support from Head Start, Youth Services Case Managers and myself, the WNESU early Education Home to School Liaison. This mom is very active at this point, going to playgroups whenever she can and she also attends all the parent meetings at Head Start. She goes to family events available in town such as the Little Lit workshops that the Rockingham Public Library and WNESU co-sponsor. She is trying very hard to be a good mom and does reach out for opportunities for her children. Sometimes she even comes to playgroup by herself just for the connections. This year, her youngest child attended a home child-care until he turned 3, which is when he started at Head Start. Even though his lead level is extremely high, his language is typically developed and his preschool skills are higher than when his older brother started. This is a result of engaging this family in community resources. This family struggles every day to fill their basic needs, and the rest of life is sometimes accessible and sometimes not."

C. Self-Identified Need that Data does not Show

In the spring of 2012 a small group of people, including Youth Services and Parks Place staff, met at the Central Elementary School with the principle, school nurse and a school counselor. They learned of the large proportion of students living in dysfunctional family situations and recruited additional service provider professionals to address the widespread concern about the healthy development of the district's children. The meeting was deeply disturbing and ultimately initiated the spark for change in the Bellows Falls community.

The school staff revealed over 60% of the students live in poverty with food, shelter, heat, electrical, hygiene and clothing deficiencies. That children had to shower at school due to lack of proper hygiene in their homes, that the school provided clothing, and that the school had purchased a washer and dryer to laundry student's clothing. Central Elementary School staff are spending more of their time and resources responding to crises and basic needs versus focusing on academics during the school day. There were also issues with children not getting their medication and having no food over the weekends. There were deeply disturbing reports of

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child abuse and neglect. After the meeting with school officials, staff from Youth Services, Parks Place, the Bellows Falls Police Social Worker and a Nurse Practitioner from Rockingham Medical Group met to identify next steps to address widespread and system issues that were directly impacting the healthy development of children in Central Elementary School. The READY BY 21 framework emerged as a viable option in addressing not only the health issues, but also the social and cultural norms that perpetuated the issues.

D. COMMUNITY WILL (spirit):

Despite the enormous challenges this community faces in improving outcomes for children, it has the will and dedication of the community to make change. There are existing collaborations and infrastructure in place in Bellows Falls that would support the quick and effective implementation of the Promise Community work. Parks Place is a community resource center located in the heart of Rockingham and next door to Central Elementary School. It is the HUB of the community. Parks Place hosts many health, human service and education programs that are otherwise only available in Brattleboro or Springfield. Parks Place also helps people get connected to other resources that are available in the area. The Parks Place PATCH Team is a group of local providers who meet every month to problem-solve community issues and collaborate in the delivery of services. These organizations provide services to the children and families who are the target population of the Promise Community Initiative.

In addition to the work that occurs through the PACTH team meetings at Parks Place, the collaborative work started 3 years ago by the Ready by 21 Leadership Council (RB21), based out of Parks Place, aligns perfectly with the goals of the Promise Community Initiative and extends it further along the age continuum serving children from birth through age 21. The goal of the RB21 Leadership Council is to support the healthy development of children in Bellows Falls and the greater region so they are ready for work, learning and life. Using a collective impact model, the RB21 Leadership Council strives to achieve key outcomes for children from birth through age 21. The RB21 Leadership Council, with financial support from the HOLT Foundation, worked with a facilitator from the Forum for Youth Investment to convene multiple stakeholders' sessions. These sessions brought together a cross-sector group of over 80 people from the Bellows Falls community to identify the

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problems impacting children, identify root causes and develop action plans to improve the likelihood children will be ready for learning, work and life. RB21 is working to re-establish hope the children of Bellows Falls.

RB 21 Collaborative Leadership Council is responsible for moving forward this work and includes Youth Services, Parks Place, Springfield Medical Care Systems, Bellows Falls Police Department, Chroma Technology, Greater Falls Pharmacy, Health Care and Rehabilitation Services, Greater Falls Connections, Windham County Sheriff's Office, WNESU staff, Chroma Technology, United Way of Windham County and the owner of the Greater Falls Pharmacy. The RB21 Leadership Council has already established working committees to address the following goals as it relates to children and youth in Rockingham; a) Academic Success b) Reducing Teen Pregnancy c) Preventing child abuse and neglect d) Reducing substance abuse and use.

In addition to the partners from the RB21 Leadership Council, the additional partners who will help make the work happen for the Promise Community Initiative includes Dr. Anita Hall (local physician), Central Elementary School, Windham Northeast Supervisory Union staff including the Home School Liaison, Nurse Family Partnership of VNA/VNH, the Springfield Area Parent Child Center, Chroma Technology, Silver Forest Inc., Our Place Drop-in Center, Bellows Falls Police Department, and the PATCH Team at Parks Place. We expect this list of partners and collaborators will continue to grow. Resources from the Ready By 21 initiative and collective impact model will help this growing group of partners learn how to work together to achieve collective impact for children and families in Bellows Falls.

E. ANTICIPATED IMPACT

The total student population at Central Elementary School as of March 2015 is 168. Based on current preschool enrollment and other data, there is an estimated 222 children between the ages of 0-6 year old in Bellows Falls as of March 2015. It is the hope of the Ready by 21 Leadership Council, to connect all families with children to resources from the time of a parent's pregnancy through age 6.

Promise Community Pledge of Commitment

Attachment 2 Pledge of Commitment

Organization/agency submitting application


Targeted School District/ Supervisory Union:

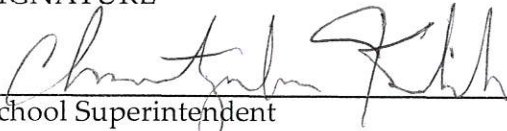
Targeted School(s):


Sponsor:

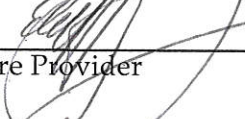
We pledge to support the local community of Bellows Falls to improve the lives of the young children in a Promise Community. To do this we will work together in a coalition of partnerships with regular meetings and communication to reach the community goals to fulfill the *promise of every child*. The goals and outcomes will be developed as part of needs assessment, strategic planning and implementation process.


This form must be signed by Building Bright Futures Regional Coordinator; targeted school principal (s); targeted school superintendent; Regional Agency of Human Services Field Director; and community child health care provider, indicating their pledge to participate as a partner in the implementation of the work plan presented in this application. Other partners are encouraged to sign as well to make a commitment to be a Promise Community.

 Chad Simmons 3/2/15
Building Bright Futures Regional Coordinator
SIGNATURE PRINT DATE

 Christopher Kibbe 3/5/15
School Superintendent
SIGNATURE PRINT DATE

 KEITH NEMLICH 3/9/15
School Principal
SIGNATURE PRINT DATE

 Elot Hall AD 3/12/15
Child Healthcare Provider
SIGNATURE PRINT DATE

 Lynn M Boyle 3/9/15
AHS/Field Director
SIGNATURE PRINT DATE