



# A Better Way *Forward*



Community Foundation  
of Eastern Connecticut

**2021 Report to Our Community**



VISION

A healthy, thriving, sustainable Eastern Connecticut with greater equity for all.

MISSION

Collaborating with partners to put philanthropy into action to address the needs, rights and interests of our community in Eastern Connecticut.

VALUES

Integrity, Equity, Respect, Courage, Empathy

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On the cover: 2021 grantee,  
Eastern Connecticut Ballet  
[Photo courtesy of The Day  
Publishing Co.]



The Lighthouse Museum/  
The Stonington Historical Society

“And so we lift our gazes not to what stands between us,  
but what stands before us.”

When 22-year-old poet Amanda Gorman recited those words on the steps of our nation’s Capitol in January 2021, she stirred a country striving to heal from a catastrophic pandemic, political and racial divisions, and the festering wounds of long-lasting inequities.

Concluding her poem, *The Hill We Climb*, she dared us to boldly shape a better future.

“The new dawn blooms as we free it. For there is always light, if we are brave enough to see it. If we are brave enough to be it.”

In the last year, we set our sights on charting a better way forward for our region’s residents. Most were reeling in the wake of the country’s turmoil.

We wrestled with crucial questions: Where could philanthropic and pandemic relief funds best be applied? How could these investments create the sturdy scaffold for our region’s residents to climb upward — and to create better lives for themselves? How could philanthropy disrupt and mend public policies that limit opportunities for some members of our communities?

Based on our outreach to policy experts, local residents and elected and community leaders, we heard of opportunities for real systems change in Eastern Connecticut, starting with three key areas: *early childhood care and education, mental health and wellness, and affordable and safe housing.*

A transformational opportunity is before us to break the cycle of “one-off assistance” and create supports and policies that sustain change. American Rescue Plan funds have infused Eastern Connecticut communities with dollars our leaders must invest smartly. And our grantmaking must be laser-focused on using the power of philanthropy to create thriving communities for the long term.

Within these pages, you’ll see stories of how dedicated nonprofit organizations and caring donors are changing lives. You’ll see where basic needs have been met and where building blocks have been laid to make it easier for the most vulnerable among us to succeed.

And you’ll hear where calls to action were heeded — where your voice, your generosity, and your advocacy catalyzed policy change. We are far from finished.

Thank you for your partnership in creating a better way forward for our region.

Gratefully,

Maryam Elahi  
*President & CEO*

Lynn Malerba  
*Chair, Board of Trustees*

*“To get us out of this crisis and to have an equitable, sustainable recovery, Connecticut needs to substantially invest in **universal early childhood care and education**. It’s a critical, foundational structure that allows parents to work. Employment is impacted negatively when the infrastructure around it is weak. Similar to our roads, buildings and internet, high-quality early child care benefits us all – it’s good for children, for communities and for the economy.”*

— Emily Byrne,  
Executive Director  
Connecticut Voices  
for Children

## Families Sought Child Care – and Found a Neighborhood

### RIVERFRONT CHILDREN’S CENTER

Sue Radway, executive director of Riverfront Children’s Center in Groton, saves many of the grateful notes she receives from parents. It’s easy to see why.

One read: “To be a first-time mother and find out your son is on the autism spectrum is a scary and uncertain feeling... I was nervous the [Center’s] teachers wouldn’t have patience or the kids would make fun of him. The opposite happened. Riverfront embraced him. His teachers made me feel at ease. And when the cutest little girl and her mother came up to us and were so excited to see my son, I cried like a baby in the car. As the saying goes, ‘It takes a village.’ That village includes the caregivers and teachers of our children.”

In the midst of a national early child care crisis, parents yearn for affordable, high-quality early care and education centers like Riverfront.

Grant support from the Community Foundation helps the Center provide tuition assistance to 80% of the families it serves — typically hard-working, hourly wage employees in the hospitality, manufacturing, retail and health care fields.

“We take the time to understand families’ hopes and dreams,” Radway said. “We want them to know their children are loved, well cared for, and learning.”

Riverfront wraps families in all kinds of support. “During tours, we’ll casually say, ‘Here’s where our food pantry is. If you ever have any need for some groceries, stop in there and pick up a bag.’ Or, ‘Here’s the table with seasonal clothes. Feel free to donate clothes your child has outgrown or take other donated clothes...Oh, and what size is your child? We have a diaper bank. Help yourself.’”

“We are a neighborhood,” Radway said. One where Riverfront parents help each other out. Where a parent of a child with disabilities can go to work with the peace of mind that their child is safe. Where a single mother can count on Riverfront to nurture her child while she earns a nursing degree.

“All our parents want their children to succeed when they go on to school. It’s incredibly rewarding for us to provide enough support to them to make that happen,” Radway reflected.

Working families find affordable  
child care – and a circle of support –  
at Riverfront Children’s Center.





Connecticut Legal Services Attorney Ashley Daley [at right] advises Windham County residents about stable, affordable housing options.

## Turning Anguish to Relief for People Facing Homelessness

### CONNECTICUT LEGAL SERVICES

Ashley Daley often heard the anguish on the other end of the phone.

It came from people who'd labored, often for years, to lift themselves toward self-sufficiency and independence. But they'd been dealt a setback: the threat of eviction.

As an attorney with Connecticut Legal Services, Daley responded to dozens of Windham County residents facing homelessness in the last year. All were lower wage earners. When the pandemic-related freeze on evictions ended and recovery funds for rental assistance dried up, the calls increased.

Daley offered legal help. "A lot of things we saw were unjust. Some landlords gave people false information in trying to evict them. They preyed on people's lack of education about their rights."

Anguish turned to relief when Daley stepped in. Supported by a grant from the Community Foundation, Daley worked with mediators to broker compromises and agreements, create payment plans, contest dishonest rental practices, and educate tenants about their housing rights.

One elderly couple faced eviction from a landlord who hadn't done any repairs to their home for six years. Conditions were deplorable. The couple had fixed incomes (one had stage four cancer) and the landlord wanted them out. *In one week.*

"They were distraught and they really needed an advocate," Daley said. "It's such a traumatic experience to be faced with the loss of something so personal — your home."

Daley filed motions and legal papers on behalf of the couple and eventually got them a hearing before a judge. The couple was granted three more months at home — a lifeline for finding alternative housing.

"My joyful moment was when the couple told me, 'Out of this whole thing, we're just so glad you were there for us,'" reflected Daley. "That's what a lot of people told me — they just needed someone in their corner."

*"Emergency rental assistance became an even more critical need during the pandemic for so many Connecticut families. I believe the advocacy community for affordable and safe housing will now be more focused than ever on increasing the availability of flexible housing vouchers for our most vulnerable families."*

— Sean Ghio,  
Senior Policy Advisor  
Partnership for Strong  
Communities

*“To improve long-term mental health outcomes, the focus needs to change from reactive to proactive. During the pandemic, we all realized how under-resourced our mental health response system was. We also realized that **mental health and wellness** is relevant in everyone’s daily life – at home, school, work, and in social situations – anywhere that people interact. In the future, we need to be sure that mental health care is available in all those areas.”*

— Diane Manning,  
President/CEO  
United Services

## New Clinic is a Bridge to Better Health in New London

### CHILD AND FAMILY AGENCY OF SOUTHEASTERN CONNECTICUT

When nurse practitioner Aymi Bennhoff described the impact of the new Community Bridge Clinic in New London, she recalled the families she’d treated from Portugal, Brazil and Pakistan. They came to this area to create better lives for themselves, often for jobs in the service industry, casinos or restaurants.

“When a health care provider sees you as a whole person — your physical health and emotions and all your issues — it’s such a safe feeling. And that safety is critical for healing, especially for our immigrant families. Because of language barriers, they often feel more vulnerable,” Bennhoff said.

That’s why the Bridge Clinic takes a bit more time treating immigrant families, and why translation services are at hand so patients can communicate health needs in their primary languages.

And it’s why the Bridge Clinic offers an array of health services to care for the whole person, including immunizations, physicals, women’s health, and diabetes management. They’ve got an eye on offering support groups and health education classes in the future. And the Clinic refers patients to therapists and psychiatrists right in the same building, where mental health concerns can be addressed with compassion and cultural sensitivity.

The Child and Family Agency of Southeastern Connecticut, boosted by a grant from the Community Foundation, opened the Bridge Clinic in 2021 to help meet some of New London’s unmet health care needs. They found that people of color or people who earned lower wages often had less access to safe housing, reliable transportation or grocery stores — which all factor into the quality of one’s health.

The Bridge Clinic is already making health care easier and faster. Newcomers to New London’s school system were often delayed 3-4 weeks to start school because they didn’t have a primary care provider or health insurance for the necessary physical exam or vaccines. Not anymore.

“I think about the trauma of poverty — the choices that some people are forced to make every single day about paying the rent or going to the doctor or even just the struggle of finding a health care provider. It creates significant emotional stress,” said CEO Allison Blake, Ph.D.

By lessening that stress with seamless, holistic treatment and preventative health care, the Bridge Clinic is caring for a grateful New London community.

The new Community Bridge Clinic offers an array of health care services to treat the whole person.



Photo courtesy of Child and Family Agency of Southeastern Connecticut

# Growing Access to Healthy Food for All

Low-income and rural areas often have limited access to nourishing fresh foods. The food justice movement addresses these disparities – especially in communities of color disproportionately affected by food insecurity – by introducing resources like food banks, community gardens, and healthy food initiatives. The Community Foundation’s food justice grantmaking aims for all community members to have access to nutritious, affordable food, land on which to grow a healthy food system, and more control for residents in the production and distribution of their own food.

## In 2021, the Community Foundation:

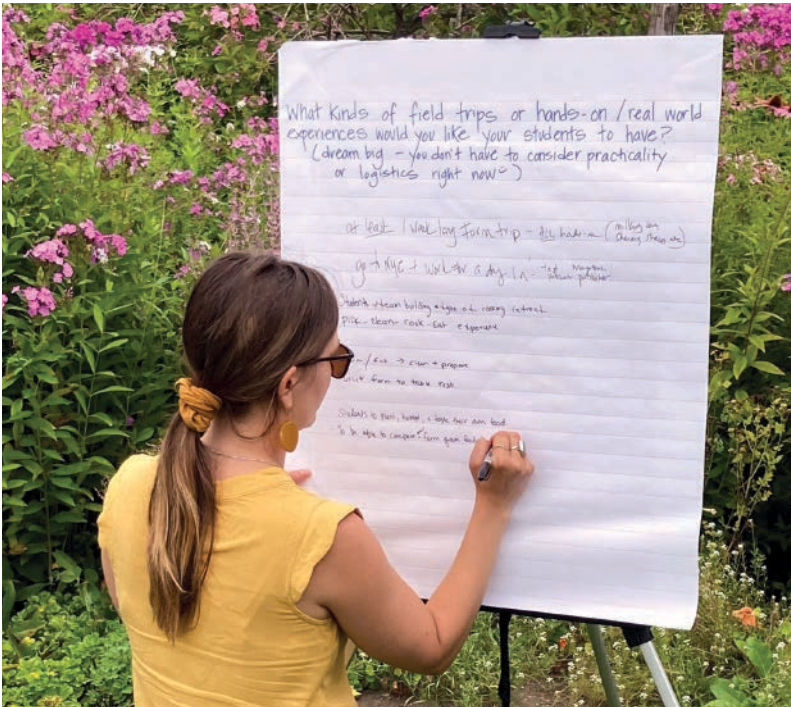
>> **SUPPORTED FoodCorps** in connecting school children to healthy food: learning where food comes from and how to grow, cook and eat it. In four Groton and New London elementary schools, students gardened, sampled scratch-made cafeteria food, and attended monthly dinners with their families to test new school recipes. Next up: Connecticut’s first farm-to-school program.



^^ **FUNDED FRESH New London** in engaging hundreds of young people and city residents in growing healthy food in their neighborhoods. They built snack bed gardens, developed the Cottage Street Urban Farm, grew culturally appropriate crops, involved families in creating backyard and community gardens, mentored each other about growing and harvesting crops, and hosted events to support food justice and local agriculture.



<< **SUPPORTED** expansion of the **Eastern Pequot Tribal Nation’s** Mary Momoho Community Garden. By clearing land, building new garden beds, and adding solar green energy and irrigation systems to the garden, the Tribal Nation’s food pantry delivered fresh vegetables to more of its members in need of healthy food – and created a sustainable food source.



^^ **FUNDED Yellow Farmhouse Education Center’s** teacher training efforts to develop a new culinary curriculum for Connecticut high school students. It covered how to source, prepare, and consume food in ways that sustain people – *and* the environment.



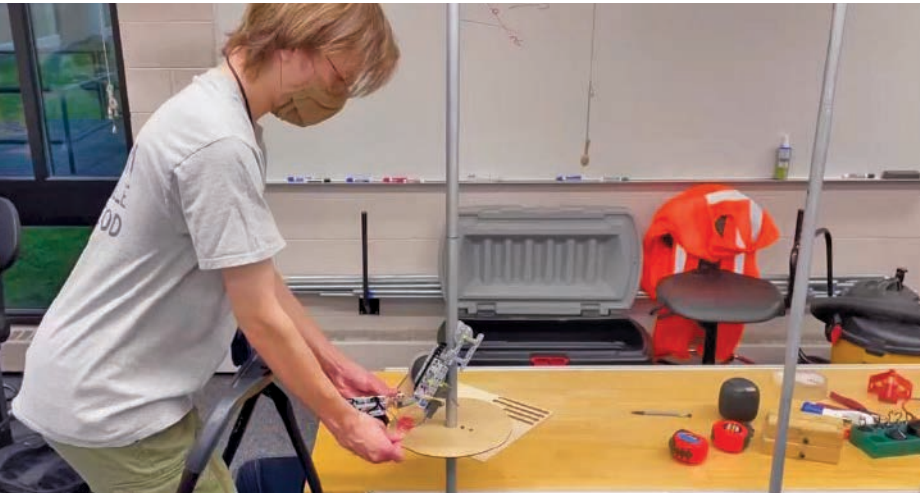
^^ **SUPPORTED GROW Windham’s** efforts to work with hundreds of its diverse community members – especially youth – at local gardens like Lauter Park Community Gardens in Willimantic. The Windham Youth CORE’s Thread City Family Garden donated all its food so 25 families could receive weekly food boxes. Individual gardeners and volunteers cultivated plots of vegetables for donation to other households lacking access to fresh food. All told, they harvested a whopping 2,363 pounds of produce using sustainable agriculture methods.

A Mythbusters Fan Engineers His Career

Ledyard’s Luke Roberts figures he’s seen every episode of the TV show *Mythbusters* at least twice. Watching scientists tackle popular questions — sometimes in wildly unusual ways — whetted his appetite for doing experiments and inventing objects.

Roberts, a first-year mechanical engineering major at Rochester Institute of Technology, is now the one doing the hypothesizing and designing — with computers, 3-D modeling and a knack for figuring out how things work.

Two scholarships from the Community Foundation’s funds, the **Malcolm F. and Harriet B. Brown Scholarship** and the **Pfizer Scholarship**, are making college more affordable for Luke. He’s grateful to the donors “for deciding I was worthy of help and for giving me the opportunity to do something I wanted to do with my life.”



Each student in Luke’s engineering class was given motors, batteries and wiring and was tasked with designing a robot that could climb a pole as fast as possible. Luke’s robot finished the climb in under 30 seconds! [Photo courtesy of Luke Roberts]

Standing up for Pets in Need of Medical Care

Gus, a gorgeous two-year-old black Labrador, was one lucky dog. **Stand Up For Animals**, with grant support from the Community Foundation, rescued Gus, got him the heartworm treatment he needed, and found him a caring home.

In 2021, Gus was one of about 90 animals in southeast Connecticut on the receiving end of essential medical care, dental treatments, vaccines and pet medicines thanks to Stand Up For Animals. The organization intervened to secure low-cost vet care when pet owners couldn’t afford it, and the nonprofit stocked local food pantries with pet food, too. It was a win-win all around: furry friends got necessary medical care and nutrition, and families could stay with their beloved pets rather than separate when money was tight.



Gus at Stand Up For Animals

Murstein Family Fund Continues a Legacy of Learning

Nelly Murstein and her late husband, Bernard, enjoyed long and accomplished careers as professors and scholars at Connecticut College in New London.

Later, in establishing the **Murstein Family Fund** at the Community Foundation, they lovingly memorialized Nelly’s role model — her mother, Rebecca Elnekave Cassel. It was she who had begun the family’s legacy of learning.

As a single mother during World War II, Rebecca worked four jobs while raising five children in Beirut, Lebanon. They had little money, but certain memories stand out to Nelly: Her mother making time to be the compassionate confidante to other hardworking women. Her mother caring for the swollen hands of laundry workers, then giving them clothing, money, food, or advice.

And this: Nelly’s mother traveling by bus from Texas to New York, showing up at her daughter’s door after Nelly had decided not to attend college.

“She literally took me back by the ear so I’d go to college, because my mother always told me that women had to be financially independent. It was the most wonderful thing that could have happened to me,” Nelly recalled.

Incredibly, years later Rebecca earned a Ph.D. in French literature at Rice University alongside her son, Edwin. He was awarded his doctorate from Rice on the same day! Nelly, by then a mother of two, earned *her* Ph.D. from Rice the following year.

The Murstein Family Fund will continue to benefit women and girls in southeast Connecticut for generations to come. In creating the fund,

Nelly and Bernard aimed to open up more educational and job training opportunities for women. And if that meant child care to allow women to work, the fund would cover that, too. The couple wanted women to be able to realize their dreams of greater independence in life.

To Nelly Murstein, there’s no better way to honor her mother.



Nelly and Bernard Murstein [Photo by Felipe Bida/Lasell University]

# Donors Creating Better Futures

In 2021, the Community Foundation received over 1,600 donations from individuals and organizations who gave more than \$8.5 million in support of causes that matter to them and to the well-being of Eastern Connecticut residents. We are very grateful to these extraordinarily generous people.

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We are deeply grateful for all gifts! Due to space constraints, you can find 2021 gifts under \$500 at [cfect.org/CurrentDonors](https://cfect.org/CurrentDonors)

# The Legacy Society: Sustaining Generations to Come

The Legacy Society honors people who have included the Community Foundation in their estate plans. Through bequests, charitable trusts and gift annuities, retirement plans, or life insurance, they plan to make gifts to causes important to them after their lifetimes. We are deeply grateful to every member of the Legacy Society for the care and compassion they put into action through their future gift.

- Barbara Agosin

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# Our Partners in Philanthropy: Professional Advisors

Professional advisors often recognize when the Community Foundation is the right partner for clients who have a charitable vision. Historically, over half of the gifts to the Community Foundation have come as bequests or other planned gifts made with the guidance and expertise of professional advisors. Special thanks to the following professional advisors for their advice and community service:

- Stephen Adams

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Alyson Aleman

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## New Funds: Lasting Gifts for Our Communities

Thank you to the caring and generous donors who created these funds at the Community Foundation in 2021:

## DONOR-ADVISED

Spyros Barres Fund  
Roderick Canavan Haff Fund  
Martha L. Gibson Charitable Fund  
Nancy Gentes Fund  
The Goldens Fund  
Tina Lajoie Northeast Women & Girls  
Housing Security Fund  
PARJE (Public Art for Racial Justice  
Education) Fund  
Parker Family Fund  
William Silva Fund for the Arts

## FIELD OF INTEREST

Barbara J. Armstrong Fund for Windham  
Women and Girls  
Fund for Racial Justice  
Alice Catherine Hamilton Fund for  
Windham Women and Girls  
Everett L. and Irene L. Herden Fund  
Barbara G. Sahagan Legacy Fund

## SCHOLARSHIP

Killingly High School Class of 1970  
Alumni Scholarship Fund  
Make Your Mark Scholarship Fund  
Sheffield Pharmaceuticals DEI Scholarship

## AGENCY ENDOWMENT

Connecticut Humane Society Fund



For a conversation on how you can start a fund to achieve your philanthropic goals, contact Lauren C. Parda, senior development officer, at [lauren@cfect.org](mailto:lauren@cfect.org) or 860-442-3572.

## Stewarding Your Funds

We are committed to stewarding the charitable funds entrusted to us by our donors to get as many dollars as possible out to the causes, nonprofits and communities they care about.

Our Investment Committee consists of board members and volunteers with extensive institutional investment experience and varied perspectives. With oversight by our board, the committee is responsible for developing and implementing our investment policy, recommending investment managers, and monitoring our investment performance.

The committee works with our investment managers at Brown Brothers Harriman (BBH) and Boston Trust Walden Company (BTW) to preserve and grow the endowment through prudent investment strategies in a well-diversified portfolio. Our three-pronged asset-allocation approach centers on growth, risk reduction and inflation protection.

As we continue to bring an equity lens to our work, we also continue to explore ways to align our investments with positive community impact. Both investment portfolios are designed to reduce exposure to tobacco-related products, fossil fuels, gun manufacturers or distributors and private prisons. BTW is a longtime specialist in actively applying additional Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) screens to that investment portfolio, with special attention to the environment and animal welfare.

CliftonLarsenAllen LLP ([www.CLAconnect.com](http://www.CLAconnect.com)) conducts our audit. The financial statements are available on our website at [cfact.org/About/Publications](http://cfact.org/About/Publications).

**Brown Brothers Harriman Portfolio  
Investment Performance (net of fees)**

2021	7.7%
2020	17.9%
2019	19.0%

3-yr Annualized Return 14.8%  
Return since inception (2009) 9.1%

### Boston Trust Walden Company Portfolio Investment Performance (net of fees)

2021 16.9%  
2020 9.77%  
2019 24.6%

3-yr Annualized Return 17.09%  
Return since inception (2016) 12.3%

## Investing in Your Community

## ASSETS

**\$ 123,416,332**

(\$ millions)

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## GIFTS

**\$ 8,534,994**

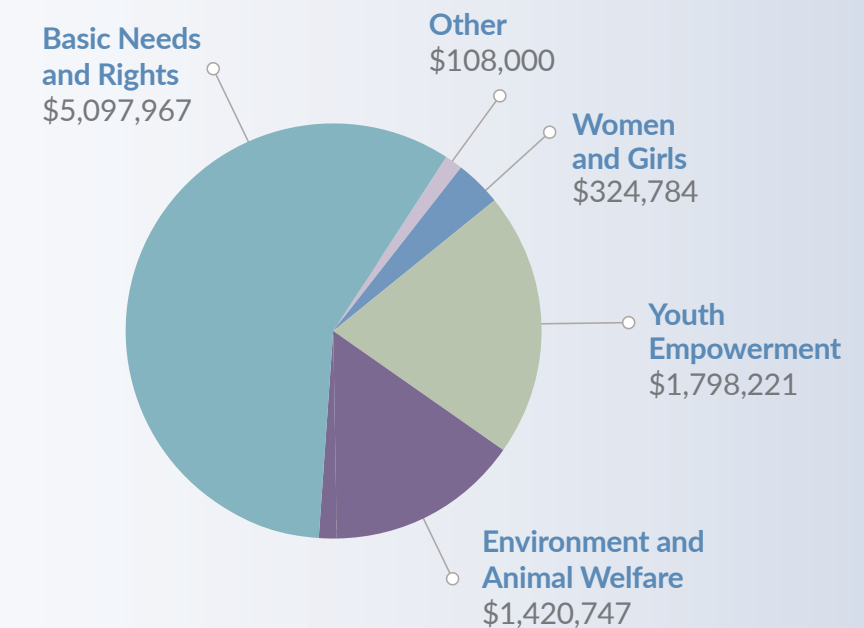
(\$ millions)

[illegible][illegible][illegible]

## GRANTS

**\$ 8,749,719**

(\$ millions)

[illegible][illegible][illegible]

## 2021 GRANTS BY INTEREST AREA

**Grand Total \$8,749,719**



Community Foundation  
of Eastern Connecticut

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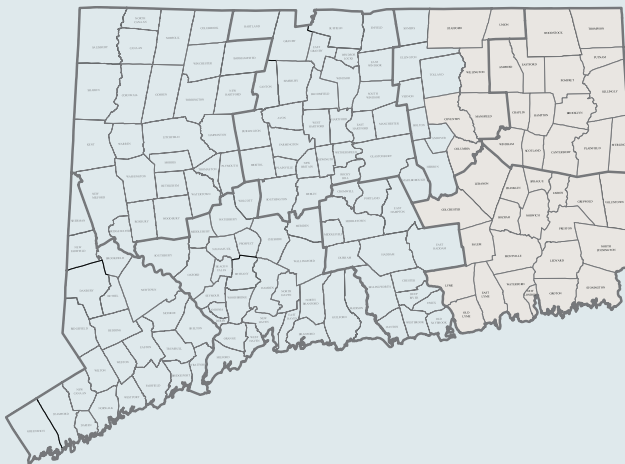
## CONTACT US

For more information, call 860-442-3572 or email [admin@cfect.org](mailto:admin@cfect.org).

Sign up for our e-news at [cfect.org](http://cfect.org) and connect with us on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and LinkedIn.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This report is dedicated to the early Community Foundation Trustees and the generous donors who created charitable funds and a legacy of caring for their neighbors.



### Serving 42 towns in New London, Windham and Tolland Counties:

Ashford  
Bozrah  
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Canterbury  
Chaplin  
Colchester  
Columbia  
Coventry  
Eastford  
East Lyme  
Franklin

Griswold  
Groton  
Hampton  
Killingly  
Lebanon  
Ledyard  
Lisbon  
Lyme  
Mansfield  
Montville  
New London

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Windham  
Woodstock

*The Community Foundation  
of Eastern Connecticut  
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National Standards for  
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that benefit communities.*

