

TOWN OF VERNON

Office of the Mayor

14 Park Place • Vernon, CT 06066

Tel: (860) 870-3600 • Fax: (860) 870-3580

www.Vernon-CT.gov



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Press Contact:

David Owens, Communications Specialist

Desk (860) 870-3574

Cell (860) 494-5973



Daniel A. Champagne
Mayor

Michael J. Purcaro
Town Administrator

Dawn R. Maselek
Assistant Town Administrator

Town of Vernon to Offer Mental Health Services to Vernon Residents

American Rescue Plan Funding Supports Partnership with Hockanum Valley Community Council to pay for Social Worker

(VERNON, Connecticut) – The Town of Vernon in partnership with the Hockanum Valley Community Council (HVCC) is offering free mental health counseling to Vernon residents who are experiencing grief, loss, stress and anxiety related to the coronavirus pandemic.

The Vernon Town Council unanimously authorized Town Administrator Michael Purcaro to sign a contract with the Vernon-based social services agency for up to \$69,000 to fund a social worker who will offer counseling and help connect residents with other services. The position will be paid for with funds provided to the Town of Vernon from the federal government through the American Rescue Plan.

“As our nation, state and local community continue to recover from the pandemic, we know that people are hurting,” Mayor Dan Champagne said. “Using funds from the American Rescue Plan to provide direct mental health services to Vernon residents is wholly appropriate. We have been focused throughout the pandemic on meeting community needs and mental health is part of our overall recovery plan.”

The counselor will work with people referred by the Vernon Social Services Department, Vernon Youth Services, Vernon Public Schools and Vernon-based health and human service organizations. People can also contact the social worker directly through HVCC.

Mayor Champagne directed Town staff to convene an advisory committee of Vernon-based health and human service organizations to identify pandemic-related needs in the community, and strategies to address them. The committee includes Vernon Social Services, Vernon Youth Services, Vernon Public Schools, Cornerstone Foundation, KidSafe, Opportunity Works, Iglesia Fuente de Salvacion Misionera, and HVCC.

“For some people, the anxiety and stress they experienced during the pandemic will ease and they will return to the routines of work and visiting with friends and family,” said Town Administrator Michael Purcaro. “Others will face new or worsening stressors. We cannot underestimate the disruption and difficulty so many have experienced through the pandemic. Our goal is for the social worker to help Vernon residents deal with those stressors in a positive and constructive way.”

The pandemic has affected mental health in a variety of ways. More than 40 percent of adults have reported symptoms of anxiety or depressive disorder during the pandemic, according to the Kaiser Family Foundation, which studies national health issues. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reports stress caused by the pandemic can cause feelings of fear, anger, sadness, worry, and frustration that can have a variety of physical impacts, including worsening existing health and mental health conditions.

“At the Hockanum Valley Community Council we have a strong record of feeding the hungry and counseling those struggling with mental health and substance abuse issues,” said David M. O’Rourke, CEO of the HVCC. “The coronavirus pandemic has only exacerbated these issues and we are pleased to join with the Town of Vernon to work with and assist people in Vernon who are struggling. Working together, we can make things better.”

For more information or to sign up, please call Vernon Social Services at (860) 870-3661.

About the Town of Vernon

The Town of Vernon is a celebrated place to live, work and visit. From its beautiful parks and lakes, to its vast trails and historic homes and buildings, Vernon is a resilient and thriving community that promotes the health and wellbeing of its residents and values the natural environment. With a resident population of approximately 30,000 and occupying 18.03 square miles, Vernon combines a balanced appreciation of history, and a strong economic base for growth, both residential and commercial. Located 15 minutes east of the Connecticut capital of Hartford, and 25 miles from the City of Springfield, Massachusetts, the Town of Vernon is strategically located in “New England's Knowledge Corridor” with close proximity to some of the top colleges and universities in the country.

Designated a certified Sustainable Community, the Town of Vernon offers a wide range of benefits and services to its residents. The Town of Vernon is a full-service municipality that practices a management philosophy of continuous quality improvement. To learn more about the Town of Vernon, please call (860) 870- 3670 or visit www.vernon-ct.gov.

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