

United Children's Services
Bennington County Community Needs Assessment
2023 Update

1d. Homelessness

Table 7: Count of Homeless Children (0-18 Years)				
	Vermont		Bennington County	
	Count	% of Entire Homeless Population Counted	Count	% of Entire Homeless Population Counted
2018¹	292	23%	39	30%
2019²	251	23%	24	31.17%
2020³	216	19%	25	28.41%
2021⁴	360	14%	51	14%
2022⁵	481	17%	66	13.7%
2023	*County numbers were not made available in 2023. Only a summary report was published. According to the report, "the number of persons experiencing homelessness and in a household with children increased by 36% compared to the prior year, compared to an 11% increase of people in households with adults only" (2023 Vermont Point in Time Report, June 6, 2023)			

Table 8: Count of Homeless Students, 2019-2023			
School Year	Battenkill Valley	Bennington Rutland⁶	Southwest Vermont⁷
2020	***	***	109
2021	10 ⁸	30 ⁹	112 ¹⁰
2022	Now reported as SVSU	Not Reported	104 ¹¹
2023	Now reported as SVSU	23 ¹²	119 ¹³

¹ <http://helpingtohousevt.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/2018-PIT-Report-FINAL-5-30-18.pdf> pages 10-11.

² <https://www.vsha.org/wp/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/2019-PIT-Report-FINAL.docx.pdf> page 10.

³ <https://helpingtohousevt.org/pointintime/2020-pit/> page 4.

⁴ <https://helpingtohousevt.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/2021-Vermont-PIT-Count-by-County-and-AHS-District-Summary-FINAL.pdf>

⁵ https://helpingtohousevt.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/2022-Vermont-PIT-Count-by-County-and-Local-CoC-Summary_Details_Summary_FINAL.xlsx.pdf Retrieved 8/29/22.

⁶ Data are as of 12/1 annually. Received from Pam Latourelle, 9/4/2020.

⁷ Data represent the year end count. Received from Tori Stevens, 9/4/2020.

⁸ Data represent the year end count. Received from William Bazyk, 8/6/2021.

⁹ Data represents the year end count. Received from Paul Eaton, 8/10/21.

¹⁰ Data represents the year end count. Received from Laura Boudreau, 8/5/21.

¹¹ Data represents the year end count. Received from Laura Boudreau, SVSU Homeless Liaison, 8/11/22.

¹² Data provided by Deb Hathaway, Early Childhood Education and Special Education Director, 8/10/23.

¹³ Data provided by Laura Boudreau, Assistant Superintendent, SVSU, 8/14/23.

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1e. Children in the child welfare system

2020 Community Needs Assessment (p.17):

We were unable to locate data about children in foster care in Bennington County on the Vermont Agency of Human Services - Department for Children and Families website, and they did not respond to our data request. However, Vermont Insights reported in 2019 that in Bennington County, there were an estimated 64 children under age 9 in DCF custody as of September 30, 2019.¹⁴ In addition, as of August 20, 2020 the Children's Integrated Services Early Intervention Program (Southwestern Vermont Medical Center) was providing services to 150 children in Bennington County ages 0-3 years, of whom 12 were in DCF custody.¹⁵ An additional 14 children were in the process on intake/evaluation to receive services, 3 of whom were in DCF custody.¹⁶

2021 Update:

46 children under the age of five years were in State's custody within the time frame of 08/01/20 – 07/31/21 in Bennington County¹⁷.

2022 Update:

39 children under the age of five years were in State's custody within the time frame of 08/01/21 – 07/31/2022 in Bennington County¹⁸.

2023 Update:

16 children under the age of five years entered into State's custody between 08/20/22 through 08/20/23.¹⁹

¹⁴ <http://vermontinsights.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Bennington-2019.pdf>

¹⁵ Data as at 8/20/2020. Received from Jennie Moon, Program Coordinator of Children's Integrated Services Early Intervention, (Southwestern Vermont Medical Center).

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Data provided 9/10/21. Received from Michele Webster, Administrative Coordinator for Department for Children and Families (Bennington).

¹⁸ Data provided 9/12/22. Received from Michele Webster, Administrative Coordinator for Department for Children and Families (Bennington).

¹⁹ Data provided 8/23/2023. Received from Michele Webster, Administrative Coordinator for Department for Children and Families (Bennington).

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BENNINGTON DISTRICT OFFICE

CALENDAR YEAR	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
TOTAL CHILD SAFETY INTERVENTIONS	420	402	308	381	347
- Investigations	234	224	139	165	175
- Assessments	186	178	169	216	172
Child abuse assessments	106	93	97	124	106
Family assessments	80	85	72	92	66
OUTCOMES OF INTERVENTIONS					
- Investigations substantiated ¹	66	79	47	37	26
- Cases opened for services ²	149	129	96	118	95

¹ INVESTIGATIONS SUBSTANTIATED = A report is substantiated if the evidence found during the investigation would lead a reasonable person to believe the child was abused or neglected.

² CASES OPENED FOR SERVICES = A case is opened for ongoing services if, during any type of intervention, the assessed risk of future maltreatment is determined to be high or very high.

Source: <https://outside.vermont.gov/dept/DCF/Shared%20Documents/FSD/Reports/CP-BENNINGTON.pdf>

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1f. Disabilities

Children's Integrated Services (CIS) Early Intervention (EI) Program Services

	2020 Community Assessment²⁰	2021 Update²¹	2022 Update²²	2023 Update*²³
Number of children ages 0-3 years receiving EI services	150	163	177	Not reported
Of number of children receiving services, number of children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) diagnosis	3	11	11	9
Of number of children receiving services, number of children suspected to have ASD	17	18	16	25

* Bennington's Early Intervention office reported in July 2023 that complex needs seem to be increasing and that several children are in the process of genetic testing. Other diagnosis include: Gorlin's Syndrome, Mosaic trisomy 18, Cerebral palsy, Opitz G/BBB Syndrome, Congenital Malformation of corpus callosum, Vator Syndrome, Broncho-pulmonary dysplasia, Pompe disease, tethered spinal cord and hearing loss.

Jennie Moon, Early Intervention Coordinator for Bennington County, reports that the waitlist to receive Early Intervention services varies between one and six months. Telehealth services are sometimes available for eligible children.

²⁰ Data as at 8/20/2020. Received from Jennie Moon, Program Coordinator of Children's Integrated Services Early Intervention, (Southwestern Vermont Medical Center).

²¹ Data as of 9/9/2021. Received from Jennie Moon, Program Coordinator of Children's Integrated Services Early Intervention, (Southwestern Vermont Medical Center).

²² Data as of 9/9/2022. Received from Jennie Moon, Program Coordinator of Children's Integrated Services Early Intervention, (Southwestern Vermont Medical Center).

²³ Data provided by Jennie Moon, Program Coordinator of Children's Integrated Services Early Intervention, (Southwestern Vermont Medical Center).

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Table 14: School-aged Children with Disabilities in Bennington County, 2020-2022

Supervisory Union								
	Battenkill Valley		Bennington Rutland		Southwest Vermont			Windham Southwest
	2020	2021 ²⁴	Not reported	2023 ²⁵	2020	2021 ²⁶	2022 ²⁷	No update reported
Students with Autism²⁸	No Data	16		No Data	No Data	73	85	
Students with Emotional Disturbance²⁹	*** (<11)	4		No Data	52	51	65	
Total count Students with Disabilities³⁰	No Data	Not reported		48	No Data	822	No Data	
Students with IEPs³¹	80	Not reported		No Data	709	710	860	

2023 Update:

The Southwest Supervisor Union reports that 105 preschool students are currently being served under the “developmental delay” disability category, and at least 40 more children are expected to qualify for IEP services. SVSU Early Childhood Education department expects to serve 155 children with disabilities at the beginning of the 2023-2024 school year.

According to the Building Bright Futures 2022 [State of Vermont's Children report](#), seventy-eight percent of Southwest Vermont Supervisory Union's students were deemed “ready for kindergarten,” while twenty-seven percent of students were reading proficiently by third grade.

²⁴ Data from Rachel Boisvert, Battenkill Valley Supervisory Union, 9/9/21.

²⁵ Data provided by Deb Hathaway, Early Childhood Education and Special Education Director, 8/10/23.

²⁶ Data from Meghan Mezkat, Southwest Supervisory Union, 9/13/21

²⁷ Data provided by Meghan Mezkat, Southwest Supervisory Union, 8/22/22. Data includes both SVSU and Battenkill Valley numbers, as the two school districts combined in 2022.

²⁸ Data from Rob Galloway, Vermont Agency of Education, 9/4/2020.

²⁹ Data from Rob Galloway, Vermont Agency of Education, 10/13/2020

³⁰ Data from Rob Galloway, Vermont Agency of Education, 9/4/2020.

³¹ Data from Rob Galloway, Vermont Agency of Education, 10/13/2020

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Educational Assessments

SUPERVISORY UNION / SCHOOL DISTRICT	KINDERGARTEN READINESS⁴ (FALL 2021)	3RD GRD READING PROFICIENCY⁵ (SPRING 2021)
Battenkill Valley SU	Not Available	50.0%
Bennington Rutland SU	88%	49.1%
Southwest Vermont SU	78%	27.2%
Windham Southwest SU	92%	37.5%

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Social Services and Mental Health:

From July 2022 to January 2023, thirty-six (36) children ages eight and under accessed Bennington County Family Emergency Services. Forty-two percent (42%) of these children were previously enrolled in Head Start services and accessed this emergency program between one and seven times each from July 2022 to January 2023. Of the fifteen children who were previously enrolled in Bennington County Head Start/Early Head Start, two children utilized United Counseling Services' Psychiatric Urgent Care for Kids (PUCK) program³².

Table 26: Social and Mental Health Service Needs of Head Start/Early Head Start Enrolled Children, 2018-2023

Indicator	Head Start 2018- 2019	Head Start 2020- 2021	Head Start 2021- 2022	Head Start 2022- 2023	Early Head Start 2018- 2019	Early Head Start 2020- 2021	Early Head Start 2021-2022	Early Head Start 2022-2023
Cumulative enrollment	136	109	108	91	76	64	66	73
Experienced homelessness	11	9	8	9	8	5	4	3
In foster care	10	9	5	7	13	6	9	9
Referred by CPS	23	13	10	1	18	8	9	5
# Children about whom mental health consulted w/staff	19	16 ^[1]	14	12	1	1 ^[2]	0	2

4a. Access to childcare and preschool programs

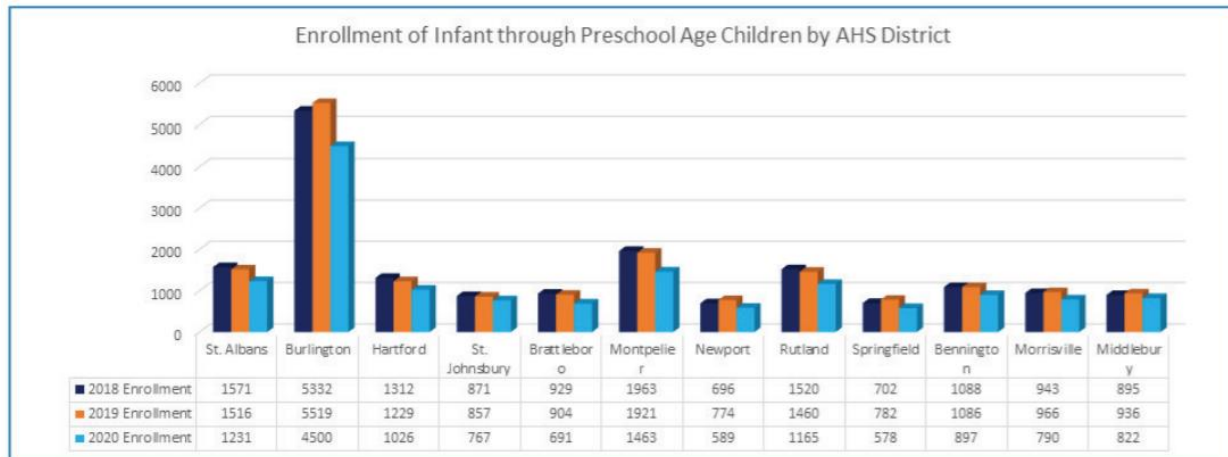
2021 Update: The Southwest Supervisory Union's Early Childhood Education Division Street program has reduced its capacity by one classroom for the 2021-2022 school year.

Other capacity data has not yet been updated by Let's Grow Kids, Vermont Insights or the local child care referral agency, Bennington County Child Care Association.

Table added 2021:

³² Data provided by United Counseling Services, June 20, 2023.

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³³As noted in the Vermont Child Development Division's December 2020 Child Care Report: *Enrollment can be impacted by many factors, and this survey does not ask the reasons for any changes in enrollment. Some factors might include family choice/need, program capacity, COVID-19 response, and more.*

2022 Update:

The Southwest Supervisory Union reports that Bennington County Head Start is the only universal pre-k partner program with openings.

According to the Vermont DCF Commissioner, Bennington County experiences a thirteen percent decline in capacity for infants between October 2020 and September 2021, while capacity for toddlers and preschoolers increased by three and two percent, respectively.

New table added 2022³⁴:

³³ https://dcf.vermont.gov/sites/dcf/files/CDD/Reports/December_2020_CC_Programs_Report.pdf

³⁴ Brown, S. 2022, January 28. Report to the Vermont legislature: Child care capacity building. Vermont Agency of Human Services Department for Children and Families. <https://legislature.vermont.gov/assets/Legislative-Reports/Act-74-B.318-Child-Care-Capacity-Building.pdf>

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**Impact of Change by Age Category in Licensed Capacity of Child Care
Programs between October 2020 and September 2021**

	Change from October 2020 – September 2021				Percent Change			
	Infant	Toddler	Preschool	School Age	Infant	Toddler	Preschool	School Age
Bennington	-25	5	12	11	-13%	3%	2%	3%
Hartford	8	14	25	-265	4%	8%	3%	-21%
Burlington	18	22	135	-234	2%	2%	4%	-4%
Barre	-2	7	15	-62	-1%	4%	1%	-5%
Morrisville	-2	-13	-125	-43	-2%	-8%	-17%	-9%
Middlebury	8	13	23	-69	8%	13%	4%	-7%
Newport	0	0	0	0	0%	0%	0%	0%
Springfield	-7	0	-2	17	-8%	0%	0%	2%
St. Albans	10	8	39	-248	9%	9%	5%	-37%
St. Johnsbury	0	3	37	-22	0%	2%	6%	-4%
Rutland	29	55	16	37	14%	30%	2%	3%
Brattleboro	16	34	-5	6	10%	19%	-1%	1%
Statewide	53	148	170	-872	2%	6%	2%	-6%

2023 Update:

As of July 7, 2023 SVSU counted 230 students enrolled in public pre-k for the 2023-2024 school year and expected at least another 130 enrollments, for a total of 360 children public pre-k students across eleven partner programs.

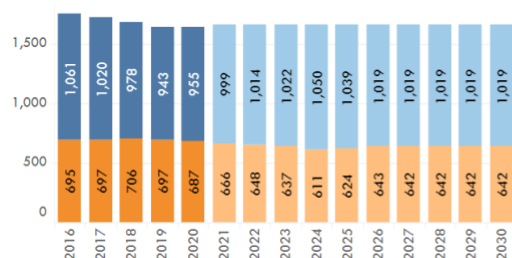
According to the [PMFO Populations Pilot](#) conducted by Economic and Public Policy Research, 409 children ages birth to four years were estimated to be eligible for Head Start/Early Head Start services in Bennington County in 2023. United Children's Services served 164 Head Start/Early Head Start children in the 2022-2023 school year, or forty percent (40%) of the total eligible children. *UCH served ninety-one of the projected 157 Head Start-eligible children, or nearly fifty-eight percent (58%). UCH served seventy-three of the two hundred fifty-two Early Head Start eligible children, or nearly twenty-nine percent (29%).*

According to the Population Pilot's estimates, United Children's Services exceeded its projected 2023 enrollment (118 students) by forty-six students.

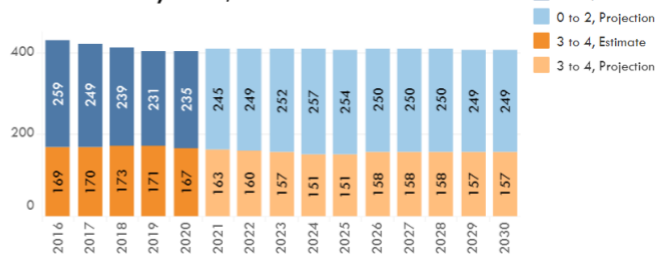
United Children's Services Bennington County Community Needs Assessment 2023 Update

PMFO Population Projections Pilot

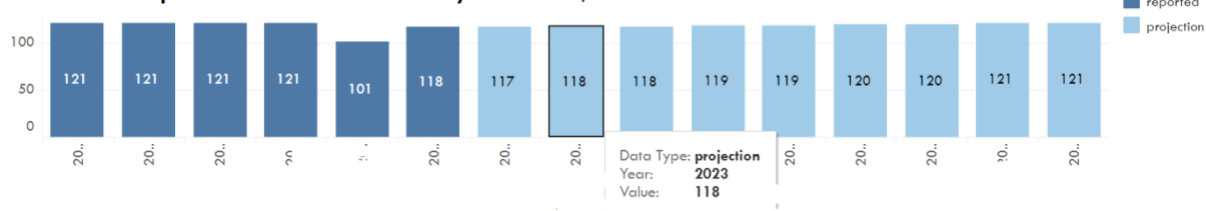
Population Projections for children aged 0—2 (Early Head Start) and 3—4 (Head Start), 2016-2030



Population Projections for children aged 0—2 (Early Head Start) and 3—4 (Head Start) below Federal Poverty Level, 2016-2030



Enrollment Projections for Head Start & Early Head Start, 2016-2030



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1c. Poverty in Bennington County Updates

Table 1: Bennington County Demographics	
Demographic	Bennington County
Total population	37,312 ³⁵
Children <5 years of age	1,687 ³⁶
Children <5 whose household income is below poverty level	20.2% ³⁷
Children under age 6 years with no parent in labor force	332

SNAP Benefits June 2022:

3SquaresVT
Households, Recipients and Benefits
By Vermont County for June 2022

	Households	Recipients	Children Under 18	Monthly Allotments	Allotments Percentage
ADDISON COUNTY	1682	2844	841	\$710,278	4%
BENNINGTON COUNTY	3028	5413	1738	\$1,335,238	8%
CALEDONIA COUNTY	2494	4374	1337	\$1,091,665	6%
CHITTENDEN COUNTY	7587	13184	4248	\$3,317,619	19%
ESSEX COUNTY	595	1028	303	\$253,100	1%
FRANKLIN COUNTY	3492	6199	1994	\$1,543,366	9%
GRAND ISLE COUNTY	431	815	274	\$199,996	1%
LAMOILLE COUNTY	1411	2478	794	\$615,886	4%
ORANGE COUNTY	1684	3039	976	\$742,530	4%
ORLEANS COUNTY	2668	4688	1480	\$1,154,171	7%
RUTLAND COUNTY	4970	8162	2354	\$2,068,895	12%
WASHINGTON COUNTY	3387	5604	1683	\$1,427,856	8%
WINDHAM COUNTY	3614	5908	1672	\$1,512,300	9%
WINDSOR COUNTY	3417	5860	1759	\$1,471,067	8%
UNKNOWN COUNTY	80	158	64	\$39,959	0%
State Total	40540	69754	21517	\$17,483,926	100%

These figures are not fully reconciled with accounting totals.

Prepared by the Economic Services Division
Vermont Dept for Children and Families - 7/25/2022

³⁵ United States Census Bureau. 2020: Decennial Census.

<https://data.census.gov/cedsci/table?q=0500000US50003&tid=DECENNIALPL2020.P1>

³⁶ American Community Survey. (2020). ACS 5 year estimates data profiles: ACS demographic and housing estimates.

<https://data.census.gov/cedsci/table?q=children%20with%20parents%20in%20the%20workforce%20Bennington%20County,%20VT>

³⁷ United States Census Bureau. 2020 American community survey: Poverty status in the last 12 months.

<https://data.census.gov/cedsci/table?q=child%20poverty%20Bennington%20County,%20VT&tid=ACSST5Y2020.S1>

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SNAP Benefits June 2023:

3SquaresVT
Households, Recipients and Benefits
By Vermont County for June 2023

	Households	Recipients	Children Under 18	Monthly Allotments	Allotments Percentage
ADDISON COUNTY	1705	2859	833	\$504,433	4%
BENNINGTON COUNTY	3090	5472	1749	\$1,018,860	8%
CALEDONIA COUNTY	2523	4388	1338	\$810,789	6%
CHITTENDEN COUNTY	7663	13019	4097	\$2,472,912	19%
ESSEX COUNTY	618	1071	316	\$183,093	1%
FRANKLIN COUNTY	3463	6053	1913	\$1,127,972	9%
GRAND ISLE COUNTY	434	806	261	\$149,719	1%
LAMOILLE COUNTY	1392	2416	774	\$444,423	3%
ORANGE COUNTY	1722	3006	922	\$551,394	4%
ORLEANS COUNTY	2696	4602	1390	\$836,145	6%
RUTLAND COUNTY	5099	8323	2353	\$1,566,122	12%
WASHINGTON COUNTY	3555	5842	1747	\$1,131,216	9%
WINDHAM COUNTY	3676	6020	1721	\$1,140,899	9%
WINDSOR COUNTY	3501	5917	1760	\$1,102,822	8%
UNKNOWN COUNTY	85	141	42	\$28,677	0%
State Total	41222	69935	21216	\$13,069,476	100%

These figures are not fully reconciled with accounting totals.
Prepared by the Economic Services Division
Vermont Dept for Children and Families - 7/24/2023

Reach Up Updates June 2022:

REACH UP
Families, Recipients, and Benefits
By Vermont County for June 2022

	Families	Recipients	Children Under 19	Monthly Benefits	Benefits Percent
ADDISON COUNTY	125	296	208	\$69,792	3%
BENNINGTON COUNTY	327	886	638	\$200,646	9%
CALEDONIA COUNTY	210	531	364	\$126,996	6%
CHITTENDEN COUNTY	735	1905	1371	\$445,857	20%
ESSEX COUNTY	47	117	75	\$25,855	1%
FRANKLIN COUNTY	326	865	587	\$200,754	9%
GRAND ISLE COUNTY	43	119	80	\$29,284	1%
LAMOILLE COUNTY	119	297	201	\$73,780	3%
ORANGE COUNTY	128	300	214	\$79,412	4%
ORLEANS COUNTY	198	523	362	\$116,186	5%
RUTLAND COUNTY	448	1054	751	\$274,809	12%
WASHINGTON COUNTY	350	907	625	\$219,257	10%
WINDHAM COUNTY	275	705	479	\$162,369	7%
WINDSOR COUNTY	312	756	531	\$187,030	8%
UNKNOWN COUNTY	11	32	23	\$7,956	0%
STATE TOTAL	3654	9293	6509	\$2,219,983	100%

Prepared by the Economic Services Division
Vermont Department for Children and Families
7/13/2022

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Reach Up Updates June 2023:

**REACH UP
Families, Recipients, and Benefits
By Vermont County for June 2023**

	Families	Recipients	Children Under 19	Monthly Benefits	Benefits Percent
ADDISON COUNTY	117	261	184	\$63,768	3%
BENNINGTON COUNTY	311	850	615	\$194,210	9%
CALEDONIA COUNTY	208	534	371	\$130,162	6%
CHITTENDEN COUNTY	719	1879	1333	\$436,857	20%
ESSEX COUNTY	43	109	82	\$23,656	1%
FRANKLIN COUNTY	328	841	570	\$198,582	9%
GRAND ISLE COUNTY	42	122	82	\$27,191	1%
LAMOILLE COUNTY	121	295	206	\$76,613	3%
ORANGE COUNTY	140	331	233	\$81,867	4%
ORLEANS COUNTY	198	519	364	\$117,521	5%
RUTLAND COUNTY	430	1043	747	\$266,953	12%
WASHINGTON COUNTY	340	900	632	\$220,006	10%
WINDHAM COUNTY	288	754	515	\$169,609	8%
WINDSOR COUNTY	337	830	586	\$202,595	9%
UNKNOWN COUNTY	12	33	18	\$7,915	0%
STATE TOTAL	3634	9301	6538	\$2,217,505	100%

Prepared by the Economic Services Division
Vermont Department for Children and Families
7/13/2023

2023 Update Summary:

Homelessness

The number of children experiencing homelessness and served by the Southwest Supervisory Union in 2022-2023 rose thirteen percent from the previous year. The Vermont Housing Coalition's 2023 Vermont Point in Time report indicates that, state-wide, "the number of persons experiencing homelessness and in a household with children increased by 36% compared to the prior year, compared to an 11% increase of people in households with adults only." Despite this rise, UCH served twelve children over the course of the 2022-2023 school year who experienced homelessness, which is consistent with previous years.

The COVID-19-era rental assistance program sunset in July 2023, marking the end of pandemic housing supports. However, lack of affordable housing stock continues to be a statewide and county-wide problem.

Head Start/Early Head Start family services staff continue working with families and community partners to develop savings plans, apply for housing assistance and connect with local resources.

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Children in the Child Welfare System

Far fewer children under the age of five years entered state's custody over the past year than in the previous two years in Bennington County, and investigations and interventions also decreased. Despite the lower number of children entering State's Custody, the number of children in foster care served by UCH in 2022-2023 remained consistent with previous years. Referrals from the Family Services department declined, as expected with fewer children engaged in the child welfare system.

UCH continues to serve a high percentage of the county's children in foster care. Ongoing collaborative partnerships with the county's Family Services department and the continuation of robust mental health and family supports is necessary to the continuation of quality care and support for these vulnerable children.

Mental Health and Disabilities

The number of children with special needs served by UCH continues to grow. This is consistent with high rates of children with Individualized Education Plans enrolled in the SVSU public preschool program, and with the high number of children served by Early Intervention. In addition to volume, Early Intervention and Bennington County Early Head Start are serving an increasing number of children with complex special needs. This level of care requires special training, lower teacher:child ratios and greater consideration in classroom placement.

The BCHS/EHS waitlist reflects a high number of children with significant disabilities seeking care. BCHS/EHS will continue to seek additional training for staff in supporting children with disabilities and will continue to maintain and explore community partnerships that support children with disabilities and their families. In the 2023-2024 school year, program staff plan to offer regular educational support groups for families of children with special needs.

In addition to educational and developmental delays, preschool children continue to demonstrate the need for behavioral and mental health supports. The number of referrals for one-on-one mental health counseling continues to exceed the capacity of the program's Mental Health Consultant. Furthermore, forty-two percent of the children served by the county's Family Emergency Services from July 2022 to January 2023 were former Head Start students, indicating that children's behavioral and mental health challenges follow them into their early elementary years.

In the 2023-2024 school year, UCH is initiating a program improvement plan to improve collaboration, information sharing and continuity of services with the local designated agency's Children, Youth and Family Services division.

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Access to Child Care

Despite lower than funded enrollment for the Head Start program, UCH served fifty-eight percent of the county's projected Head Start-eligible children in 2022-2023, competing with at least eleven other public pre-k programs. UCH served only twenty-nine percent of eligible infants and toddlers, suggesting an unmet need for Early Head Start-eligible children and their families.

The program was included in the 2023 Enrollment Cohort due to lower-than-funded Head Start enrollment. The data collected here will support the program as it assesses options for conversion or reduction, if needed, over the next year. However, as program partnerships grow, these considerations may no longer be necessary.