



**Press Release, Sept. 30, 2021**

## **Passing the Torch to Continue a Beloved Community Tradition**

For 48 years residents in Montpelier and surrounding towns have rallied around, counted on, and cherished the Free Community Thanksgiving Dinner founded and organized by Washington County Youth Service Bureau (WCYSB). Last year, amidst the disruption and restrictions of the COVID pandemic, the WCYSB enlisted the help of National Life Group and Sodexo who generously took the lead to ensure that our community was fed and spirits were nourished, even during a pandemic.

Now, the WCYSB is stepping out of its long time role and is grateful that National Life Group and Sodexo are committed to continuing the tradition. In the coming weeks, they will share details about this year's dinner which again, due to COVID, will be offered for pick-up and delivery only.

What started out small grew dramatically year after year. "Eventually the dinner outgrew our agency's capacity," says Kreig Pinkham, Executive Director at the WCYSB. "It was just unsustainable. And then COVID hit and we suddenly had to come up with a different model. We're enormously grateful to National Life Group and Sodexo for taking this on last year and now going forward. We know this event is in capable hands, with organizations that are as caring and committed to the community as we are."

As the WCYSB passes the torch it's worth noting the 48 year community wide effort, commitment, and impact of this event. Each year the dinner received a massive outpouring of support from individuals and businesses who donated food, supplies and monetary gifts, who baked turkeys and pies, and who helped prepare, serve, and deliver meals.

In 2019, prior to the pandemic, the WCYSB provided 814 meals, almost double since 2009. 416 meals were served to people at the sit-down dinner held at Montpelier's Bethany Church, and another 398 meals were delivered throughout central Vermont to people who were homebound. Leftover food was donated to local food pantries and shelters, feeding even more people in need.

That year alone, the event served up 60 turkeys, 115 pies, 300 pounds of squash, 200 pounds of potatoes, and 61 dozen fresh rolls along with other Thanksgiving staples. 164 volunteers helped out. Nineteen volunteer drivers delivered meals along 20 different delivery routes throughout Washington County. The WCYSB's staff did the organizing and soliciting. They recruited and managed volunteers, took orders for meal delivery, helped prep and cook food, and volunteered on Thanksgiving Day.

For long-time volunteer Bill Preis of Middlesex, this event holds special meaning, "The meal rejuvenates and re-energizes old friendships. This has been an uplifting event to be involved with."

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Pinkham recalls the event's origins, "We began, and continued this event for 48 years because of our deep belief that strong community connections are important to everyone's well-being. And that's especially critical for youth to learn, grow and thrive."

Pinkham says there's a whole community to thank. "My thanks to all the donors, to the turkey roasters, pie bakers, potato peelers, to the volunteers who served the meals and delivered the meals. To the volunteers who came early on Thanksgiving Day to set up, and who stayed late to clean up, and those who helped out in so many other ways. To Bethany Church and the Unitarian Church in Montpelier for the use of their space year after year. And my thanks to the staff of Washington County Youth Service Bureau who put their heart, soul, energy, and time to make 48 Thanksgivings so meaningful and enriching for thousands of people in our region."