Looking back on 2021, we faced plenty of challenges from the continued ravages of the COVID-19 pandemic, and yet our team truly rose to those challenges. Now we face the year ahead better prepared to take on anything thrown our way.

Early in the year, as soon as vaccines were publicly available, we coordinated efforts to vaccinate our staff and to provide the vaccine to eligible people we serve, including the seniors living at our assisted-living facility, The Retreat, in Hartford as well as the residents at our homeless shelters. We also conducted vaccine clinics in conjunction with the Community Health Center.

Additionally, we launched a “Vaccine Hesitancy Program” designed to address individual fears and health concerns as well as issues related to transportation, technology, language barriers, and other hurdles found within the BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color) community.

But the pandemic was not the only challenge of this past year. As we have seen from recent news reports, everyone is now talking about “supply chains” and disruptions that make it hard to get things like needed food and supplies. This, in turn, makes it harder to deliver services to those in need. These problems hit our Elderly Nutrition Program head on, and yet that team continued to find a way to persevere and get more than 1,000 nutritious meals per day out to the seniors who rely on programs like Meals on Wheels.

This past year, our McKinney Men’s Shelter in Hartford was closed, but services continued as we moved residents to an area hotel. This clever solution helped to provide additional social distancing when we needed it the most. And now, it is anticipated that CRT will be purchasing a hotel in the Greater Hartford area and reimagining the delivery of services to the homeless, including on-site support from behavioral health services. A bond project at our East Hartford Family Shelter was completed during this past year providing much-needed renovations to the building, including a new roof.

We also found ways to celebrate our commitment to one another and to the communities we serve. We hosted two successful golf tournaments that raised money for Meals on Wheels and our Women’s Empowerment Center. And, as you have likely seen – and can see in the middle of this annual report – we completed a gorgeous mural at CRT’s multi-service center in Hartford that prominently features the late Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg, along with other powerful women leaders. This mural will be a steady reminder of our plans to face the future together.

Finally, as we face 2022, we are thrilled to report that our nationally recognized Medication Assisted Treatment (MAT) program, funded by a SAMHSA grant, has been awarded a new $2.6 million, five-year grant (also from SAMHSA). Our expanded MAT program will allow CRT to start mobile MAT services and methadone research and administration. It is anticipated that this program will serve at least 450 people over the next five years. We also plan to establish a brick and mortar pharmacy at CRT’s Behavioral Health Services clinic in Hartford.

No one ever said the work would be easy. But our dedicated team is committed to serving the needs of our community, now and in the years to come.

Lena Rodriguez, President and CEO of CRT
In addition to the new homeless service model for McKinney and our new five-year SAMHSA grant, there are two new programs coming next year that we want to preview with you now:

**CHESS – or Connecticut Housing Engagement and Support Services**

This is a new initiative that combines Medicaid health coverage with a range of housing services for area residents struggling with homelessness and chronic health issues. CRT is the selected service provider for our catchment area. CHESS is a new model of supportive housing case management aimed at managing the difficulties that go along with homelessness, including access to health care and handling chronic health issues. Its overall goal is promoting health and well-being by coordinating targeted healthcare with housing. Community Health Workers will work with clients to address social determinants of health – housing and co-occurring medical and behavioral health needs – with the State providing a permanent rental subsidy.

**Low-Income Household Water Assistance Program**

This new program will be administered by CRT’s Energy Assistance Program, and is designed to assist low-income households with water and wastewater bills. It will help those with the lowest incomes who pay a high proportion of household income for drinking water and wastewater services. The program will provide funds to owners or operators of public water systems or treatment works, provide restoration services, and reduce arrearages and rates charged to those households for such services.
A Message from Fernando Betancourt, Chairman, CRT Board of Trustees

While 2020 was defined by our ability to be resilient in the face of the pandemic and global tragedy that it unleashed, this past year has truly been about our collective perseverance and determination.

As Chairman of the largest community action agency in the state of Connecticut, I know that we have risen to the many and varied challenges thrown our way all year long, and have done so with a quiet strength that exemplifies our mission.

And seeing this hard work from our dedicated staff to the individuals and families that we serve throughout Central Connecticut truly gives me a profound sense of hope for tomorrow. It might sound cliché, but I really mean it. Allow me to share a few examples that show you why.

The teens and young adults enrolled in our Summer Youth Employment Program dedicated themselves to a project aimed at educating their peers in the community — and statewide — about the ravages of COVID-19 and the huge importance of getting vaccinated to help prevent this disease. They created a wonderful awareness campaign producing 370 hand-drawn lawn signs that were displayed all over Hartford and neighboring areas to alert people about what can be done to help stop the spread of COVID. They also organized an online Zoom-based roundtable discussion to dispel myths and share hard facts about the disease and why teens need to be vaccinated. That online meeting was attended by more than 100 people and included introductory remarks from Hartford Mayor Luke Bronin.

Also this past summer, young adults enrolled in our YouthBuild job-training program were able to support a massive project at CRT’s East Hartford Family Shelter, where bond funds from the state of Connecticut were used to do a wide range of renovations to the building, including the completion of a new roof. Giving the YouthBuild team a challenging — and hands-on — project that they can point to and say “I helped build that,” will create a sense of pride, accomplishment and self-worth that cannot be denied.

Another worthwhile endeavor that you will read about in this report is a pilot project that started this year to help men and women who faced the hardships of homelessness to find meaningful full-time jobs that pay a living wage and lead to permanent housing. This innovative project was designed to help those who, more often than not, would have been overlooked for job opportunities. In addition to being homeless, many never finished high school and most had been previously incarcerated, too. The deck was not stacked in their favor. But this pilot project helped to place participants in decent jobs where they could make enough money to support themselves, save money, and find a decent place to live. CRT calls it a “Fast Track” to employment and housing, and the success of this pilot over this past year shows what is truly possible when people are given the chance to thrive. We expect that this program could easily become a model for other communities nationwide.

These are just a few of the many examples from CRT in 2021 that give me hope for tomorrow. I can hardly wait to see what happens next year.

Fernando Betancourt, Chairman, CRT Board of Trustees
This past summer CRT worked with qualified homeowners in Hartford and Middlesex County who were affected by the COVID-19 pandemic to provide up to $8,000 in mortgage payment assistance through the Community Services Block Grant (CSBG) Cares Act Emergency Resource Fund. These relief payments represented a combination of two months short-term mortgage payment assistance and up to two months for mortgage arrearages, for a total of four months of possible mortgage payments.

“Our goal was to help as many households as possible access this valuable mortgage assistance program,” said Christopher McCluskey, Vice President for Housing & Community Services at CRT. “One of the most important services we can provide is to help homeowners protect the assets they’ve worked so hard to obtain, first by helping to address their immediate crisis, and then working on a long-term plan to ensure families remain stably housed.”

Since these funds came from the Community Services Block Grant (CSBG), both qualified immigrants and non-qualified immigrants could be eligible, too.

In addition to income eligibility, CRT staff worked with applicants to document verification checks with 211 and other community resources to ensure that resources from other state departments or organizations were not also available to cover the same type of assistance.

When meeting with CRT’s Foreclosure Prevention Housing Counselor, homeowners learned about other forms of financial support that were available to them such as energy assistance and other services that CRT can provide.

Mortgage assistance funds for eligible individuals were transmitted directly to the lender/mortgage holder on their behalf.

In addition to mortgage assistance support, CSBG Cares funding provided rental assistance, security deposits, and utility assistance (both for arrears and current payments) where needed. Other forms of client assistance included providing help with car repairs and transportation costs, emergency food, household furniture, personal protective equipment, and 30-day supplies of medications.

Through the end of October, CRT assisted more than **220 households** – of that total, 162 were unduplicated needs, and 58 received multiple forms of support. This amounted to more than $243,000 in financial support for people in need (see chart below with details).
Despite the ravages of the COVID-19 pandemic during the past year and a half, our state’s dedication to preventing homelessness brought new programs, funding sources and broad attention to the issue of ensuring people have safe and permanent housing. And CRT was there to help provide those services.

**UniteCT Provides Much-needed Rental Assistance**

CRT worked with the State Department of Housing on UniteCT, a program that provides up to $15,000 to households that have suffered financially in the pandemic. UniteCT provides rental and utility assistance, covering arrearages and future payments.

We held events and invited people into our facilities – with or without appointments – to initiate applications. When UniteCT vans visited, CRT volunteers assisted people outdoors, using tablets to access information and navigate applications.

We provided services to 1,012 households, and played an integral role in making Connecticut one of the few states that achieved the federal goal of distributing $100 million in assistance by September 2021.

**Decompressing Our Shelters**

Last year, CRT’s McKinney Shelter moved its operations into an area hotel to allow for social distancing both for residents and staff. This experience inspired us to develop an entirely new, permanently decompressed shelter model.

We’re now in the final stages of purchasing an area hotel that we’ll renovate into a shelter, offering increased privacy and reduced congregate space.

Expected to open in 2022, this new shelter will offer single and two bedroom units, a commercial kitchen, and wrap-around services including behavioral health and substance abuse counseling, a health clinic, group counseling and case management. Our teams are working to reimagine what it means to provide emergency shelter to people in need in our community.

We’ve witnessed a startling uptick in the numbers of homeless children and families this year. Because of COVID-19, CRT’s East Hartford Family Shelter continues to operate at approximately half capacity, so our staff is diverting families out of shelter into the safety of hotels. CRT’s goal is to quickly move these homeless families into permanent housing.

**Stable Housing Changes Lives**

We’re passionate about housing and are proud to report that we’ve permanently housed more than 100 people in the past year. Housing keeps families together, provides stability, and facilitates employment.

Accessing housing was difficult in 2021. The eviction moratorium made landlords uneasy, and they became reluctant to take on new tenants. Many landlords understand that CRT can help navigate new tenant relationships. This allowed our staff to secure rental units in this nearly impossible market.
Housing Services Provided in 2021

At the **McKinney Shelter**, CRT served 204 individuals and of those discharged, 52 secured permanent housing.

At **East Hartford Family Shelter**, CRT served 24 households representing 67 people (adults and children), all of whom were housed.

At **Veterans Crossing**, 27 veterans were served and 76% secured permanent housing. The remainder are still in the program. Additionally, nine veterans received help through Grant & Per Diem Case Management (housing retention program), six of whom retained permanent housing.

**Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF)**, which provides eviction prevention and rapid rehousing services, served 156 veteran families. Of that group, 96% of Veterans Families retained permanent housing.

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**Case Study**

**Father and Son Find Support and, Ultimately, a Permanent Home**

Rafael Canales relocated to Hartford from Bridgeport to gain full custody of his young son, Jayden, in 2017. When his plans to live with family fell through, he and Jayden found themselves homeless, living in the Salvation Army’s Marshall House Family Shelter in Hartford.

Jayden has autism and craves consistency. Moving triggered his autism, and he found life in the shelter difficult. Jayden struggled to succeed in school and Rafael was challenged to find service providers and specialized physicians for his son. Homelessness was taking a toll on their family.

The Canaleses entered CRT’s Permanent Supportive Housing program that same year, and Rafael secured an apartment in Wethersfield where Jayden enrolled in a school that specialized in the services he needed. CRT connected Rafael to mental health services, energy assistance, emergency food assistance, and help managing his finances. Jayden continued to get the support he needed as a young man with autism.

Father and son are now succeeding together. Just this year, Rafael was approved for a Housing Choice Voucher and moved with now 15-year-old Jayden to a community in Rocky Hill that offers all the amenities they could dream of having. Rafael no longer needs supportive services and the two live together independently.

“Our family went through such a traumatic experience and CRT helped us become stable,” said Rafael. “We are truly thankful to CRT for all their programs, but especially for Permanent Supportive Housing. They have done so much to help us.”

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**CRT Adds Community Health Workers**

Fourteen CRT staff members are now certified Community Health Workers (CHWs) through the Department of Public Health. CHWs serve as liaisons between the community, healthcare and social services, and facilitate client access to resources.
CRT’s Nutrition Programs Persevere Through Record High Temps, Heavy Rains, and Social Distancing

So many people in Hartford and Middlesex counties depend on the meals that CRT’s nutrition staff plan, prepare and deliver. This past year was a year like no other, as extreme weather events, combined with pandemic-related procurement challenges and rising costs, made things harder for our nutrition programs. As always, CRT got the job done, delivering meals every day, checking on client health and wellness, and mixing in some fun and games along the way.

Getting Meals Out

Entering the second year of the pandemic, CRT continued delivering meals to senior centers where people picked them up outside, or volunteers delivered them directly to the doors of homebound seniors. In addition, Meals on Wheels began accepting additional senior clients who weren’t homebound. The Elderly Nutrition Program typically delivers between 1,000 and 1,500 meals per day.

In July, congregate dining started to reopen in many communities. Today, 90% of communities in CRT’s service area are back to offering meals at community cafes, while the remaining 10% still depend on pick up.

Once CRT staff and volunteers – and most seniors – were fully vaccinated, our clients were able to let Meals on Wheels drivers back into their homes. This allowed us to visually check on their health and wellness instead of relying on the limited information obtained through phone calls. In-person visits were especially important during the extreme heat waves of the summer, when the risk of dehydration and heat stroke become real concerns.

In January, thanks to the generosity of donors, CRT was able to add a new customized delivery vehicle to its fleet for Meals on Wheels in Central Connecticut.

CRT’s drivers are critical to getting people fed. They deserve accolades, driving every weekday through winter storms, extreme heat and cold, and torrential rains. Yet our drivers rarely missed a beat – downed power lines and flooded or snow-covered roads were among their obstacles to delivery. In those cases, emergency shelf-stable meals provided a quick solution until it was safe to get back on the road.

Procurement of supplies and food items continues to pose difficulties. Finding certain foods has become challenging, and prices of plastics, paper, and fuel continue to go up. Some supplies need to be ordered months in advance to ensure availability. We expect pricing and availability challenges to continue into the foreseeable future, a problem that has dramatically increased the costs of CRT’s nutrition programs. Many restaurants and food suppliers nationwide faced similar problems this year. Except, at CRT, there’s no choice but to figure out a solution. Our seniors truly depend on the meals we provide throughout the year, so our programs can’t shut down temporarily.

While no one enrolled in Meals on Wheels is ever denied services for an inability to pay (the suggested donation is $3 per meal), fewer clients have been able to donate during the pandemic. Along with fixed federal reimbursements, it’s been harder to cover inflated program costs. Our senior meals program always appreciates donations of goods and services as well as generous financial support from the community.

Travelers Donates More Than 51,000 Meals to CRT

As we noted in the 2020 annual report, while most of their employees worked from home, Hartford-based Travelers agreed to donate hot lunches each weekday to CRT and other local charitable organizations in the city to help keep their food service vendor contract operational during the COVID-19 pandemic. As the pandemic continued in 2021, Travelers maintained its work-from-home routine, and they continued to provide hot lunches to CRT. In fact, they agreed to keep the donations going through the end of the year. These meals made their way to people served by a variety of CRT’s programs, including the East Hartford Family Shelter, Veterans Crossing, and The Retreat assisted-living. As of the end of October, Travelers donated more than 51,000 meals to people served by CRT.
CRT Provided Free Summer Meals for Kids in Hartford and Neighboring Towns

To help combat childhood hunger when school is out of session, CRT once again managed local coordination of a federally funded Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) to provide free breakfast and lunches to children 18 and younger.

CRT delivered hundreds of meals to children each weekday from the end of June to late August at 14 locations in Hartford and neighboring towns, providing nutritionally balanced meals to children who miss access to regular school-time meals. In total, CRT delivered more than 35,000 meals for kids this summer.

In early August, Rep. John B. Larson (pictured) visited a Summer Food site at the Hartford City Mission, along with End Hunger Connecticut’s No Kid Hungry Youth Ambassadors, to see the work that CRT was doing and to spend time with the kids.

Prior to the pandemic, seniors would gather at congregate meal sites (aka Community Cafes) in senior centers and other locations to eat hot, nutritious meals (prepared by CRT’s Nutrition Department) and socialize. COVID-19 put a screeching halt to all that fun until this summer, when congregate dining began to resume. To reintroduce seniors to socializing and dining in, CRT nutrition staff planned three fun events involving a socially distant game show called the Congregate Friendly Feud.

Loosely based on the TV show Family Feud, Congregate Friendly Feud pitted teams from two senior centers against each other via an online meeting in a spirited trivia competition. All the seniors involved had a wonderful time, and Scot Haney from WFSB News 3 hosted the first event: South Windsor Senior Center vs. Enfield’s Mark Twain Senior Center.

CRT would like to thank the National Association of Nutrition and Aging Services Program (NANASP) for the grant that made these joyful events possible.

Congregate Friendly Feud Brings Seniors Together

Meals on Wheels Golf Classic

The 20th Annual Meals on Wheels Golf Classic, held on September 13, was a record-breaking success. With 136 golfers participating, CRT brought in $20,000 in new revenues from golfers, sponsors, donors, and advertisers for a grand total of $81,500 raised! We’re grateful for the commitment of our tournament sponsors and the new companies that stepped up to support the event this year.

Thank You to Our Leading Sponsors:

Mitchell Fuel Co., Inc., Presenting Sponsor
Southeast Agency LLC, Presenting Sponsor
All Waste, Inc., Trophy Sponsor
Access Health CT, Dinner Sponsor
Metzger Lazarek & Plumb, LLC, Lunch Sponsor
Hartford Hospital, Breakfast Sponsor
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TD Bank, Contest Sponsor
Canon Solutions America, Inc., Printing Sponsor
Pronto Printer, Printing Sponsor
iHeart Media, Media Sponsor

$81,500 Raised
In this second year of the pandemic, CRT staff worked tirelessly, adapting our programs to help keep the communities we serve safe from the threat of COVID-19 using intervention, education, protection, and treatment strategies.

Making Isolation Easier During the Pandemic

Throughout 2021, CRT continued to serve as a **Community Resource Coordinator (CRC)** for 41 towns in Hartford and Middlesex Counties, providing immediate interventions for anyone needing to quarantine due to COVID-19 infection or exposure. We provided everything needed – food, diapers, formula, sanitizing products, PPE, medication and health equipment – to stay safely at home.

Preventing outbreaks in large family households and at congregate living facilities like shelters, rooming houses, halfway programs and hospitals became a major focus of this year’s CRC program. In these settings, people had no way to isolate, so we moved infected or exposed individuals to hotels, providing needed supplies for the duration of their stay. This helped prevent family and community spread.

The CRC team worked closely with contact-tracers, community providers/collaborators, and service organizations. Volunteers and donations have been critical to the success of this program, and we thank: 4-CT for donating funds needed to buy supplies, area food pantries for providing food and supplies, the Salvation Army for shelf stable meals, and our Retired Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP) for delivering meals and supplies throughout the region.

Serving 41 Towns in Hartford and Middlesex Counties
Changing Minds, Saving Lives

Even as vaccines became generally available, widespread misinformation made some people unwilling to get vaccinated. The Community Health Center Inc. (CHC) recognized this hesitancy and reached out to CRT for help. Funded by a grant from the Hartford Foundation for Public Giving, CHC and CRT launched a Vaccine Hesitancy Program designed to address fear and health concerns as well as issues related to transportation, technology, language barriers, and other hurdles among the BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color) community. With an ultimate goal of vaccination, we deployed an educational program that presented information to clients at CRT facilities and in the community at public locations and events.

This program targeted people at high risk of contracting COVID-19, including those who are economically disadvantaged, ex-offenders, minorities, the LGBTQ+ community, and those with chronic diseases and illnesses. Some people were current or former addicts who might be immunosuppressed, and were living in shelter, halfway houses and other communal settings.

This program broke barriers to vaccination. After meeting to discuss and ease client concerns, program staff helped them register for the vaccine. If the mobile vaccination clinic was on-site, shots were given immediately. Otherwise, staff scheduled vaccines and followed up with registrants to get them to their appointments. A partnership with Utopia Home Care allowed outreach workers to deliver vaccinations to hesitant homebound residents through relationships with trusted providers.

CRT’s Own Staff Lead the State in Early Vaccination

This past spring, CRT became one of the first large employers in the state of Connecticut to mandate vaccinations against COVID-19 for all of its employees. With the implementation of this policy, more than 98% of CRT staff were vaccinated by the end of June. While a small number of exemptions were granted for medical or religious reasons, the majority of CRT’s employees are now fully vaccinated. As the year progressed, major employers statewide instituted similar vaccine mandates of their own.

CRT Helps Dad Battling Addiction

Matthew Hjalmeer’s familiarity with opioids started as a teen with prescription medications and morphed into illicit drug use. The woman he married was also an addict, and they continued to use for over a decade. Together they had a daughter, now four years old.

In March 2020, Matthew had been sober for 10 months, and was receiving one-on-one therapy and working with the Intensive Outpatient (IOP) and Medication Assisted Treatment (MAT) programs at CRT. When COVID hit, he was furloughed from his job and struggled to stay clean in a home where his wife hadn’t stopped using. He eventually relapsed under the stresses of pandemic living. The Department of Children and Families intervened, demanding that Matthew and his wife enter treatment. The two went into rehab.

Matthew’s relationship with his wife crumbled. As he fought to get clean, she continued to use. He left the rehabilitation program and the relationship, and entered an inpatient sober living program in July, where he became clean again. By September, he was back in CRT’s IOP and MAT programs. Having graduated from IOP, he now regularly participates in relapse prevention and remains part of the MAT program.

Today, Matthew is actively working his recovery, has full custody of his daughter, and a full-time job. He’s well-known and well-liked at CRT’s Behavioral Health Services program, where his humor and positivity lends to the supportive environment. Matthew wants to continue his education and hopes to work in addiction recovery someday.
Teaching Teens about COVID-19

Our Summer Youth Employment Program focused on COVID-19 education and outreach as the Delta variant was surging and the vaccination rate in Hartford was just 41.3%. Our 85 program participants prepared and executed a civic engagement campaign, educating their community on the importance of getting vaccinated against COVID, and the availability of the UniteCT rental assistance program.

While the campaign was directed toward everyone in the Hartford community, younger people were an important target group. Vaccines had recently become available for them, and they were at higher risk from the Delta variant. Many lived in families struggling to pay their rent and utilities.

To encourage vaccination, program participants made 370 signs they put up in neighborhoods throughout Hartford. The group organized an online panel discussion to encourage youth vaccination, and provided a medical expert to answer questions and address common misconceptions. More than 100 people attended the online panel. Signs were also made to promote rental assistance with UniteCT.

Facing and Fighting Addiction

Our three-year Medication Assisted Treatment (MAT) program, funded by a SAMHSA grant, ended in September. This program received national recognition for both enrollment (234 people) and positive outcomes including increased employment and overall stability of participants; and decreased risky behavior, substance use, lost housing, overdoses, re-offenses and remands.

The MAT program kept people struggling with mental health and addiction sober and in treatment programs. Through telehealth, it brought needed treatment services to people who were shut in during the pandemic. These successes allowed program participants to stay housed, safe and healthy during this challenging time.

Because of the remarkable success of the MAT program, SAMHSA awarded CRT a new $2.6 million, five-year grant. CRT’s Expanded MAT Program began this year, and will allow CRT to start mobile MAT services and methadone research and administration. It is anticipated that this program will serve at least 450 people over the next five years.

Pedro Robles shared with Fox 61 News how his life-long struggle with drug addiction became even harder during the Coronavirus pandemic. CRT mental health and substance use programs including MAT have stayed open and accessible throughout the pandemic, providing services to people like Pedro.
This past year, CRT initiated an innovative pilot project to provide full-time employment and access to permanent housing to people in the community who are often denied these things that many of us take for granted. Known as the “Fast Track to Employment and Housing”, this unique program worked throughout the year with men and women who faced significant employment barriers that make access to housing equally difficult.

Individuals identified to participate in this program typically lacked a formal education and job skills, had a criminal background and were homeless.

This pilot project was divided into two phases: one for employment, and one for housing. Even though a person might have a job, it does not always preclude homelessness. To qualify for rental housing usually requires a background and credit check, which then can pose obstacles for risk-averse landlords.

The manager of the Fast Track project, CRT’s Job Developer Hammel Hall, worked with a variety of employers and staffing agencies in the Greater Hartford area to find decent-paying jobs where people enrolled in the pilot program could work. These jobs generally paid at least $15 per hour – some more – and offered full-time hours to the participants.

To help kick-start this project, initially, CRT paid a stipend to the first six people enrolled in the program, covering their weekly wages for six weeks, as well as covering any needed liability insurance. The employers paid nothing during that time, and if everything worked out, the individual would then be offered full-time work that the business would pay going forward.

As this was happening, additional employers became willing to take a chance on people who signed up for the program without the initial stipend. (In these cases, the employer paid wages from day one). During the year, 27 people were enrolled in the program and 20 of those individuals are still employed through the project.

“The partnership we have with CRT on the Fast Track program has been tremendous. Because program participants receive housing support at the same time as job placement, we’re seeing substantially better retention rates in our golf course job placements,” said Christopher Goodwin, Horticulturist at Knox, Inc. in Hartford.

Naj’Lah Eastering (20) and Kohrey Crawley (21) are a couple with a two-year old son, Kah’mari. They were homeless, unemployed and living out of their car. A friend in the Fast Track pilot encouraged them to sign up. As a result, they both are now fully employed, and their son is enrolled in CRT’s Early Care and Education program, freeing up time during the day for the parents to go to work and not have to worry about childcare. A referral to CRT’s Community Services team resulted in their receiving financial assistance via Cares Act funding to rent a two-bedroom apartment.

Now that people in the program are employed for at least six months, the focus shifts to housing and helping participants to secure a decent place to live. CRT is able to bring a holistic approach to the people being served, ensuring that everyone has access to needed services (including behavioral health services, if necessary), and opportunities to learn basic financial literacy skills.

To help with housing placement, CRT is working closely with area landlords who have demonstrated a willingness to make apartments available. Program participants have been able to get support from CSBG Cares Funds to help ensure they have enough money to pay their first month’s rent and security deposit. It is anticipated that all program participants will have permanent housing by the end of December.

The combined goals of meaningful work and safe, stable housing gives the program participants something very tangible to connect with and call their own. It drives their own commitment to this effort, and gives them a reason to be active in their own community. It has the power to change lives for the better now and in years to come. And it can serve as a model for similar programs in communities nationwide.
In the early fall, CRT orchestrated the creation of a massive public mural painted on the side of its multi-service center in Hartford (330 Market St.) to honor the life-long commitment to women’s rights and social justice of the late Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg, as well as other remarkable women leaders.

The woman commissioned to paint the mural for CRT is award-winning artist Micaela Levesque, whose vibrant artistic vision and skilled portrait work combined to make this mural a striking landmark for downtown Hartford for years to come.

The building in Hartford where the mural is located houses CRT’s Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg Women’s Empowerment Center, which offers a safe and open space for women from Hartford and Middlesex Counties to develop the skills they need to reach their full potential.

“We can think of no better way to honor RBG’s legacy than to ensure that her memory lives on through the work of CRT’s Women’s Empowerment Center,” said CRT’s President and CEO, Lena Rodriguez. “Justice Ginsburg’s accomplishments will be felt for decades to come. We know that all women in our community today – especially the next generation that is coming of age now – are better off because of her.”

In addition to prominently featuring Justice Ginsburg in the middle of the mural, it also features (from left to right):

**Former First Lady Michelle Obama**

**Supreme Court Justice Sonia Sotomayor**

**Ella Grasso, the first woman elected Governor in Connecticut and in the United States**

**Vice President of the United States Kamala Harris**

“The ideas of this mural align perfectly with my own artistic vision,” said artist Micaela Levesque. “When I learned that this RBG-inspired mural would be on the side of the building for CRT’s Women’s Empowerment Center, I knew I wanted to be involved. I am so excited to bring a visual representation of these iconic women to Hartford.”

CRT Commissions Massive Mural to Honor the Legacy of RBG
In addition to the five portraits in the mural, Levesque included a variety of painted symbols that add to the depth and complexity of the finished work of art. The project took around five weeks to complete, and it is so large that it can be seen from cars passing by on the neighboring highway overpass.

To help support the creation of this mural, CRT launched a crowd-funding campaign this fall that resulted in a matching gift of $7,500 from Sustainable CT. The crowd-funding campaign received contributions from more than 100 different donors.

“Fight for the things that you care about, but do it in a way that will lead others to join you.”

Ruth Bader Ginsburg

$7,500 Matching Gift

CRT’s Women’s Empowerment Center in Action

During this past year, CRT’s Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg Women’s Empowerment Center in Hartford served 64 households (as of August 2021), an 83% increase over the prior year; and a total of 126 individuals (a 70% increase, post-pandemic). Services provided included help with housing needs (such as eviction prevention, temporary housing and referrals to services like the Hartford Larrabee Fund and UniteCT); food insecurity and SNAP benefits; utility payments and energy assistance; as well as help with behavioral health services, including both mental health services and substance abuse recovery needs. Throughout the year, the Center also provided its members with a variety of job-support services, including mentoring and job-readiness classes.

CRT’s Women’s Empowerment Center hosted several new programs to cater to needs within the community. In August 2020, CRT’s Early Intervention Services co-hosted a Wellness Day with the Women’s Empowerment Center as an effort to keep the community united and safe. Her Time Hartford is a network designed to support and uplift women impacted by mass incarceration. Their ongoing meetings are both in-person and online.
“Giving Tree” Spreads Joy at the Holidays

At the end of 2020, a special program was set up to ensure all of the children in CRT’s Early Care and Education classrooms would receive a gift at the holidays. Through the generosity of a group of CRT staff and donors, a “Giving Tree” was organized so each child would receive a personalized gift based on the information gathered by their teachers. The children and their parents were so happy to receive their packages as they headed home for a winter break.

Vaccination Clinic at The Retreat

In mid-January, more than 100 residents and staff at CRT’s assisted-living facility in Hartford, The Retreat, received their 1st dose of the COVID-19 vaccine in a special clinic with Walgreen’s that went door to door to administer this special “Shot of Hope.” A clinic to administer second doses was coordinated based on recommended CDC guidelines.

CRT’s New Park Street Office

Renovations were completed on CRT’s office on Park Street in Hartford this year, allowing staff from Veterans Services, Housing, Job Development and other services to move in.

Financial Literacy Roundtable Features CRT

At the end of April, Lt. Gov. Susan Bysiewicz and CT Treasurer Shawn Wooden hosted an online roundtable discussion about financial literacy and “tips to truly empower your financial future.” They were joined by CT Banking Commissioner Jorge Perez, and CRT’s Director of Community Services, Elizabeth Horton Sheff, who oversees the agency’s annual Financial Literacy Institute.
CRT Helps Promote American Families Plan

In early May, CRT welcomed both Senator Christopher Murphy and Senator Richard Blumenthal, as well as U.S. Representative John Larson and Hartford Mayor Luke Bronin to CRT’s headquarters in Hartford to discuss the importance of passing the ambitious American Families Plan proposed by President Joe Biden. The work that CRT does every day is exactly what the American Families Plan is designed to accomplish: helping individuals and families access resources that will help end the cycle of poverty.

CRT Launches New Website

In the spring of 2021, CRT unveiled its new website, making it easier for visitors to quickly reach the help they need from any of the agency’s programs and services. With a responsive design, the new site is optimized for visits from both desktop and mobile devices. The front page of the site features a big “Get Help Now” button, so that individuals seeking support can fill out a quick form that immediately notifies the right team inside CRT about the type of help required. CRT’s main phone number is also prominently displayed across the site so people can quickly contact the agency when needed. The website is available at: www.crtct.org.

National Arts Program & Awards

CRT hosted its 30th Annual National Arts Program this year, and for the first time the entire program was virtual, using an online gallery to showcase the artwork. More than 100 artists of all ages and skill levels, from both Middlesex and Hartford Counties, submitted over 200 different pieces of artwork to the show. Much of the work this year reflected the artist's experience and feelings about living through the tremendous difficulties of the COVID-19 pandemic. The exhibit was open to whomever visited the site. It is remarkable that statistics report that there were a total of 109,627 views as of October 2021.

To see all the winners, go to: www.crtct.org/newsroom/news/
Pint-Sized Farmers in Training at CRT’s Preschool

This past summer, children enrolled in CRT’s preschool at the Hartford Job Corps Academy (and other locations) learned all about how food is grown with their own vegetable garden. The kids would help tend to the plants, and then pick the veggies (with a little adult supervision). CRT’s registered dietician, Karen Klemonsky, supervised this special project, and taught the children how to make their own yummy zucchini bread from scratch!

CRT’s Community Action Day and Resource Fair

During Community Action Month this past May, CRT hosted an outdoor Community Resource Fair at its headquarters on Windsor Street to offer a broad range of support and services to people living in Hartford. Services included: free walk-up COVID-19 vaccination clinic with Community Health Center, Inc.; rental assistance services with UniteCT; sign-ups for health insurance with Access Health CT; and free food distribution from The Salvation Army.

Representatives from many of CRT’s programs were on hand that day, including: Behavioral Health Services, Community Services (Basic Needs, Foreclosure Prevention, Housing Counseling, Case Management, and more), Elderly Nutrition/Meals on Wheels, Early Care and Education, Energy Assistance and Weatherization, SNAP outreach, and more. Plus, free ice cream for all!

Tee Off with Women Raises Over $35,000

CRT’s 11th Annual Tee Off with Women golf tournament was held on Wed., July 14, 2021 at the Tunxis Country Club in Farmington, benefiting CRT’s Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg Women’s Empowerment Center in Hartford. The Tee Off this year raised more than $35,000.

“This annual golf tournament is a big part of CRT’s summer-time calendar, and gives a big push to the work of our Women’s Empowerment Center, which is a much-needed safe haven and resource for women from the Greater Hartford area,” said Tenesha Grant, CRT’s Director of Women’s Services.

The Lead Sponsors for CRT’s Women’s Empowerment Center included Liberty Bank, OneDigital and Latin Financial.

Summertime at The Retreat

Members at The Retreat assisted-living in Hartford enjoyed a Summer Party on a sunny afternoon on the patio filled with dancing, music and refreshing, fruit-filled frozen “mocktails” that were enjoyed by all!
CRT Staff Appreciation Picnic

CRT’s Social Planning Committee hosted an employee appreciation end-of-summer celebration and picnic on Wednesday, September 15, filled with beautiful smiling faces, delicious food, music, games and prizes!

Birdies for Charity Benefits CRT

Through the Travelers Championship Birdies for Charity program, CRT received more donations than any prior year! We received $19,520 in donations, and Webster Bank added 15% in Bonus Bucks, making the total amount we received $22,448.

CRT Staff Get Halloween Spirit

CRT’s Jo Black and the Social Planning Committee put together a festive Halloween pumpkin decorating contest to encourage creative teamwork and the holiday spirit! They received entries from several departments and the final winners came from Finance and the Early Care and Education Job Corps teams. (Shown: one of the winning creations from the ECE team.)

New Designation for CRT: The Retreat is a Focal Point for Senior Services

The North Central Area Agency on Aging (NCAAA) recently designated CRT’s assisted-living facility, The Retreat, a “Focal Point” site. The concept of a “Focal Point” comes from the Older Americans Act meaning “a facility established to encourage the maximum colocation and coordination of services for older individuals.” Under this designation, The Retreat will serve as a gateway to the county’s aging network, connecting older adults to vital community services that can help them stay healthy and independent. (Pictured: CRT’s Julie Ackerman, Heidi Lubetkin and Megan O’Brien; and Lee Morgan from NCAAA.)
Federal, State and Municipal Agencies
Corporation for National and Community Service
US Department of Agriculture
US Department of Energy
US Department of Health and Human Services
US Department of Housing and Urban Development
US Department of Justice
US Department of Labor
US Department of the Treasury-Internal Revenue Services
US Department of Veterans Affairs
US Probation and Pre-Trial Services

State Funding Sources
CT Department of Aging and Disability Services
CT Department of Correction
CT Department of Economic and Community Development
CT Department of Education
CT Department of Energy and Environmental Protection
CT Department of Housing
CT Department of Labor
CT Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services
CT Department of Public Health
CT Department of Social Services
CT Health and Education Facilities Authority
CT Housing Finance Authority
CT Office of Early Childhood
CT Office of Policy Management

Municipalities
Avon
Bloomfield
Branford
Canton
Chester
Clinton
Cromwell
Deep River
Durham
East Granby
East Haddam
East Hampton
East Hartford
East Windsor
Enfield
Essex
Glastonbury
Granby
Guilford
Haddam

Funders and Donors
Access Health CT
Active TeleSource
Adams Hometown Market
Advanced Behavioral Health
Aetna Foundation Inc.
All Waste Inc.
American Eagle Financial Credit Union
American Federation of State County and Municipal Employees
Amplify Inc.
Amy’s Angels Corporation
Anixter
Aurora Foundation for Women and Girls
Baker Insurance
Bay Equity Home Loans
Be Thoughtful Movement Inc.
Beanz & Co LLC
Bear’s Restaurant Group
Beatrice Fox Auerbach Foundation Fund
Berkshire Bank Foundation
Big Y World Class Market
Bloomfield First Congregational Church
Blue State Coffee
BlumShapiro
BOCA Pharmacy
Boys and Girls Club of Hartford Inc.
Brothers Oil Company
Brown Rudnick
Burton & Phyllis Hoffman Foundation Inc.
Campbell Cooling / Barney Barker Oil Co.
Canel Lodge 700
Canon Solutions America
Capital Region Education Council
Capital Workforce Partners Inc.
Capitol Transmissions
Carencentrix
Cart Concepts LLC
Cencap Federal Credit Union
Center Congregational Church
Central Connecticut Pediatric Dentistry and Orthodontics
Charles Aid Foundation of America
Charity Golf International
Charter Communications
Church of the Good Shepherd
City Wide Facility Solutions of Southern New England
ClarkDietrich Building Systems
Community Foundation of Middlesex County Inc.
Community Health Center
Community Health Network
Community Health Services Inc.
Companions and Homemakers Inc.
Concentra Health Services Inc.
Congregation Beth Israel
Connecticut Association for Community Action
Connecticut Association of Latinos in Higher Education
Connecticut Community Bank
Connecticut Community Care Inc.
Connecticut Food Association
Connecticut Natural Gas Corporation
Constitution Group of Wells Fargo Advisors
Cordant Health Solutions
CRIS Radio
CV Media
Da Cor Installation Services Inc.
D’Amato Construction
Delivery Concepts Inc. Innovation in Food Transport
DeMarco Management Corporation
DG Marketing LLC
Diversified Telecom Group
Dot Think Design
Durham Manufacturing
Durham Fair Foundation
Dutch Oil Co Inc.
Eagle River Roofing Service Corporation
East Granby Congregational Church
East Hartford Lions Foundation
Eastern Connecticut State University
Electrical Contractors Inc.
End Hunger CT!
Energy Resource Group Technologies
Enterprise Builders
ES Veterans Association Inc.
Eversource Energy
Excellor Lodge No. 3
First Church of Christ UCC
First Congregational Church of Bloomfield
FLB Architecture & Planning Inc.
Full Power Radio Inc.
Gaffney Bennett & Associates
Ghezzi’s Market & Deli
Girl Scouts of CT West Hartford Troop 10443
Good Cause Gifts LLC Futures
Goodwin College
Graff Public Solutions LLC
Grant Thornton
Grande Foundation
Greater Hartford Arts Council
Greater Hartford Community Foundation Inc.
Halloran and Halloran
Harold Hart Home Performance
Hartford Building Company
Hartford Firefighters Association I.A.F.F. Local 760
Hartford Foundation for Public Giving
Hartford Health Care, Hartford Hospital
Hartford Parent University
Hartford Parking Authority
Hartford Police Union
Harvard Pilgrim Health Care
Hatchette Book Group
Hilton Hartford
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Arthur Murray Dance Center
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Doris and Gimirie Battle
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Jim Bradshaw
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Capitol Region Education Council
Carbone's Prime Restaurant
Nicollin Carr
Edward Casares Jr.
Jay Casbarro
Central Connecticut Paralegal Association
Chiromark
Christmas Wish CT
Cianci Family
Shari Carleglio
City of Hartford (HIV Testing)
Dea Collins
Congregation Beth Israel
Connecticut Judicial Branch - Support Enforcement Services
Cynthia H. and Frank M. Conner III
Constitution Group of Wells Fargo Advisors
Marvin Cormier and Nessie Cohen

“It is not enough to profess faith in the democratic process; we must do something about it.”

Ella Tambussi Grasso
“If you don’t get out there and define yourself, you’ll be quickly and inaccurately defined by others.”

Michelle Obama
You can’t dream unless you know what the possibilities are.

Sonia Sotomayor
“What’s important for my daughter to know is that... if you are fortunate to have opportunity, it is your duty to make sure other people have those opportunities as well.”

Kamala Harris
Hartford Resident Collects Clothing for Giving Tuesday

Giving Tuesday is on the Tuesday after Thanksgiving each year. This year, the giving to CRT started early, thanks to Brittany Wilborn. As part of her service on Goodwin University’s Alumni Philanthropy Board, Brittany coordinated a massive clothing drive to benefit CRT’s clients. Born and raised in Hartford, Brittany’s calling to give back to the community may have been started here at our organization. Her mother worked at CRT for years and as a little girl, she visited her mom in the summer. Brittany and other partners collected business casual clothing for both men and women, as well as warm winter clothing and accessories for men, women, and children. She plans to make this project an annual effort.
In Memoriam: Paul C. Puzzo, Former President and CEO of CRT

Last year saw the passing of CRT’s former President and CEO Paul C. Puzzo. His work at CRT began in 1964, where he started as a field worker in the community services division. During his lengthy career with CRT, Paul assumed increasing responsibilities for the agency in a variety of program and administrative positions. He was appointed President and CEO in 1983, and served in that role until he retired in 2005.

Paul was the driving force behind a capital fund drive that led to the construction of CRT’s headquarters at 555 Windsor Street in Hartford, which opened in 1991, which includes the food production kitchen for our Elderly Nutrition Program (including Meals on Wheels), along with administrative offices for the state’s largest community action agency.

During his 40 year tenure with CRT, he saw the agency grow from a budget of a mere $75,000 into a $30 million organization that positively impacts the lives of thousands of people throughout Central Connecticut each and every day.
In his final letter for the 2004 CRT annual report, Paul wrote:

“I believe the future is bright for CRT. My final message to the Agency is, ‘Be bold, be innovative and be creative. Do not fear change, but embrace it, for the best is yet to come.’”
WE BELIEVE IN HOPE

CRT’s Programs and Services

BASIC NEEDS
Resource Centers
Food and Clothing Assistance
SSBG Case Management
SNAP Outreach
CSBG Cares Assistance

EDUCATION AND YOUTH
School Readiness
Infant/Toddler Day Care
Child Nutrition
Summer Food

EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING
Capital City YouthBuild
Middlesex Youth Development
Summer Youth Employment

SENIORS SERVICES
Meals on Wheels
The Retreat Assisted Living Facility
Retired & Senior Volunteers (RSVP)
Senior Affordable Housing
Senior Community Cafes

ENERGY & WEATHERIZATION
Energy Assistance
Weatherization Services
HES-IE
Low-Income Household Water Assistance Program

VETERANS
Supportive Services for Veteran Families
Veterans Crossing
Targeted Case Management Services for Veterans

MENTAL HEALTH & WELLNESS
Asian Family Services
Behavioral Health Services
Fatherhood Initiative
Community Resource Coordinator (CRC)
Hartford Community Responders
HIV Counseling & Medical Case Management Services
Homeless Outreach
Health Navigator
Medication-Assisted Treatment Program
Pharmacy
The Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg Women’s Empowerment Center

COMMUNITY CORRECTIONS
DOC Scattered Site Supportive Housing
Re-Entry Counseling, Recovery Services
Transitional Case Management Services

HOUSING & SHELTERS
Affordable Housing
Community Housing
Engagement and Support Services (CHESS)
Community Housing Employment Enrichment Services
East Hartford Family Shelter
Generations: Grandparents Raising Grandchildren
Housing Counseling
Permanent Supportive Housing
McKinney Men’s Shelter
Rapid Rehousing
UniteCT

MONEY MANAGEMENT
Community Asset Building Initiative
VITA Tax Filing
Financial Literacy
Your Money

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