Every person has leadership potential. But… How does one learn to lead? Are leadership abilities innate or can they be taught? When is the best time to entrust young adults with leadership positions? And, what role does failure play in shaping the character of future leaders?

At VYCC, we teach leadership through experiential learning. We believe there is no “wrong” time to help young adults emerge as leaders. Rather, the greater risk is in failing to offer young people opportunities to serve and to make a tangible difference.

The stories in this report feature the unique relationship between Crew Leaders and Corps Members. It’s a wonderful dance where Corps Members are entrusted with increasing amounts of responsibility. Our role is to nurture leadership potential in an environment where everyone’s contributions matter. That it is outdoors, challenging, and fun makes the learning that much more indelible!

In this light, the intense and immersive model of a VYCC crew is a reflection of – and preparation for – our adult lives. A world where individual actions affect something greater than ourselves: the health of the environment and the strength of our communities.

In just a few weeks, Corps Members and Crew Leaders will be hard at work on the trail, in the forests, in the fields, and in a growing number of Vermont communities. By the close of the season, the change in them will be visible and profound. They will be leaders.

Thank you for your continued support and I look forward to hearing from you.

Breck Knauft,
Executive Director
2015 was a year of remarkable transition for VYCC. We celebrated 30 years of the organization’s – and our alumni’s – accomplishments. VYCC’s track record of success is remarkable - alumni still reflect on their often life changing VYCC experience.

A dedicated staff and board updated VYCC’s mission statement and identified four strategic priorities: enroll more Corps Members, deepen learning outcomes, broaden our definition of conservation and increase our conservation impact, and strengthen internal operations.

Thomas Hark, our Founding President, handed the reins to new leaders, both on staff and among the Board. We are forever grateful for Thomas’ dedication, vision, and tenacity. Tom has been the heart and soul of VYCC, and made it possible for a talented management team to propel VYCC toward continued growth, innovation, and deeply impactful programming.

While the world may seem more “connected” every day, in many ways our young adults are more disconnected. This makes the mission of VYCC more relevant and important than ever. Thank you for your support in 2015.

As we explore the experiences of young leaders in this report, you’ll notice how helmets distinguish Crew Leaders (blue) from Corps Members (green).

Jim Feinson,
Board Chair
In 2015, VYCC served **377** youth and young adults. Of these, **209** participated in our Conservation Program, and **97** in our Farm Program. **158** young women and **219** young men participated in these programs. Altogether, Farm and Conservation Crews worked over **78,000** hours.

For a residential summer crew in our Conservation Program, the weekly cost for six Corps Members and two Crew Leaders is approximately **$9,000**.

### BY THE NUMBERS

- **377** youth and young adults served in 2015.
- **209** participated in the Conservation Program.
- **97** participated in the Farm Program.
- **158** young women and **219** young men participated in these programs.
- Farm and Conservation Crews worked over **78,000** hours.

#### PARTICIPANT AGE BREAKDOWN

- **16-18** Corps Members: **217**
- **19-24** Corps Members: **104**
- **20+** Crew Leaders: **56**

#### ADMINISTRATIVE COSTS

- **Program Coordination & Operational Support**: **$1620**
- **Wages & Benefits**: **$4360**
- **Tools, Uniforms, Camping Supplies**: **$1460**
- **Administrative Costs**: **$1500**

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**Image**: A young person in a field, engaged in agricultural work.
VYCC Conservation crews completed 38 miles of new or improved trails, stabilized 10 miles of riverbanks, improved 5.5 miles of class IV roads, and built 400 new drainage structures, 28 new staircases, and 8 new bridges.

VYCC's Farm Program distributed 90,800 pounds of fresh locally grown produce and farm raised poultry to nearly 1,600 food insecure Vermonters.

VYCC's Blind/Visually Impaired Program employed 34 youth and young adults at 2 café and 8 internship sites.
Leaders Teach

2015 was Caroline’s third season with VYCC, and her first as a Crew Leader. Originally from Mendon, she graduated from Notre Dame this spring and is pursuing a Master of Education.

VYCC is about education at its core, so I saw it as a good precursor to my master’s program. VYCC helped me develop a philosophy of teaching: helping people unmask their potential; allowing them to do things they wouldn’t have seen possible before.

“I believe the best teachers are open to learning from their students. To develop as a teacher is to be open to learning from others. I learned about my Corps Members’ lives, interests, and who they want to be. Through that process we developed trust, and through that trust they were willing to learn from me and follow my direction. It was mutual learning.”

One of Caroline’s Crew Members was Matt: native of Richmond, student at
Lyndon State College, and part-time tutor. He shares, “I’m new to tutoring and I’m learning that it’s less about doing work for people and more about teaching people how to do the work themselves. That relates to Crew Leaders: they asked questions of us and made it a conversation that led to creative ideas.”

Matt summarizes his experience as a combination of work, education, and personal growth: “This was a scenario of people working really hard towards a common goal. We all participated to our fullest ability, and had a lot of great conversations – the WoRD discussions each day led to a lot of great philosophical debates which made the day go faster. I learned about patience and seeing the views of other people.”

Matt’s tentmate, Tylar, is from Barre. He shares, “You get to meet a lot of different people you never thought you would. Crew mates helped me open my eyes to new things. My tentmate is very smart. He is in college and I haven’t begun college yet. One thing we have in common is a love for the outdoors.”

In addition to developing as a teacher, Caroline and her co-leader “both developed into successful leaders by learning from each other. He wanted to work on trusting others to take charge on projects. I’m not one to command a room. Throughout the summer I took the reins and Thomas would give me critiques. I developed into a leader that I didn’t think I could be, and Thomas learned to trust me and let me lead.”
Leaders Support The Team

Amanda, a seasoned VYCC Crew Leader from Canaan, helped implement VYCC’s new partnership with Department of Vocational Rehabilitation. This young partnership continues and strengthens VYCC’s long tradition of bringing young adults from very diverse backgrounds together, creating a setting of rich personal and group growth.

“We would talk with people every day who would stop to thank us. Corps Members had a chance to engage with and feel valued by their community.” WCAX interviewed the crew about the 100 year anniversary of town forests. Amanda shares that it gave the crew a sense of pride that they were doing something important enough to be on the news.

“This was their first job. Everyone was starting from the same place. That was the contributing factor to being able to let go of preconceptions. One Corps Member said, ‘I had no idea this person was so cool. I never would have talked to this person in school, but I realize they are going through a lot of the same things I am.’ I could see the support system growing as the season went on. VYCC harbors those types of relationships: sharing a challenging experience tends to result in really strong bonds.”

“Weekly ‘Member Evaluation’ meetings were where the best conversations
started to come out. These teenagers struggled with how to present themselves to their peers. In one-on-one meetings, people started to open up, even in the discipline process.”

One Corps Member was frustrated with peers, and acted out. We had to write him up. We got to the conversation and the floodgates opened. He spoke about a loss that he hadn’t talked with anyone about. He knew that as a leader I was there for him rather than there to tell him what to do.

As Amanda led her crew, she also grew as a leader. She shares, “I didn’t really know the depth of my patience and capacity for understanding. It pushed me in those areas. Even if it was challenging in the moment, to have your resilience tested is a valuable experience.”
Leaders Empower Fellow Leaders

As a Woodstock native, Seth completed two summers with VYCC on the Woodstock Community Crew. In 2015, just after high school graduation, he signed on as a six-month AmeriCorps Crew Member with VYCC. “I wasn’t quite sure what I wanted to do. I wanted time to think about it,” he says. At the end of his VYCC experience, Seth shares, “I realized I can’t take a desk job. I decided I want to join the Navy. VYCC requires discipline. In order to get a job done you have to focus and push past your limits. That’s a great parallel to the military.”

Tinian, one of Seth’s Crew Leaders, describes the crew’s projects: “We worked with the US Forest Service in Rochester. Holly Knox and Seth Coffey set us up for success by training us in how to use radios and giving us a lay of the land. We camped at the USFS Headquarters, and got to know people from different areas of the Forest Service. It was really educational to learn what kinds of jobs are available.”

Seth also considers chainsaw work a highlight: “It was my first time doing organized chainsaw work. I learned a lot about safety precautions, more efficient ways to cut down a tree, and creating early successional habitat. I finally know how to do it right.”
Corps Members practiced leadership skills through a weekly stint as ‘One Week Leader.’ Tinian recalls, “Pairs often weren’t best friends, and sometimes had conflicts. They had to learn to work together.” Tinian and her co-lead offered structure, then stepped back and “let them run things how they wanted and see how it turned out. We met beforehand and debriefed at the end.”

“One you get going it’s not too hard,” shares Seth. “[One of my Crew Leaders] had extensive experience in trail building that was invaluable. He helped identify which Corps Members might do best at which tasks.”

Seth adds, “My Crew Leaders were amazing people: fun to talk to, good leaders and organizers, and made everything go smoothly. I don’t use the word ‘friend’ lightly and I consider them friends.” Tinian is currently leading a wilderness therapy crew in Alaska, and reflects: “I feel happy that I did VYCC. It helped me handle stress in a positive way.”

Doing ‘One Week Leader ’ terrified me.
It was an excellent learning opportunity, getting thrown into a position of power and organizing people to get work done.
Recreational Trails (Jay)
Project Sponsors: Vermont Agency of Transportation, Jay Community Land Trust
An AmeriCorps crew expanded multi-purpose trails at the Jay Community Recreational Centre, including a new connection to the Montgomery Mountain Biking Association (Grateful Treads) trail system.

“The first couple days we were working in hot humid weather. None of us knew what we had gotten ourselves into. Then we had a week of nonstop rain. We were totally soaked and uncomfortable. It’s a growing experience. You feel miserable, then there’s a breaking point and you laugh it off. We definitely got to that point.”

State Park Restoration (Waterbury, Groton, Barton, Elmore)
Project Sponsor: Vermont Department of Forests, Parks and Recreation
One highlight among many projects across four parks is creating access for users of all abilities in accordance with ADA standards. Corps Members converted two fishing platforms into universally accessible platforms at Waterbury Center, and helped construct a universally accessible trail at Crystal Lake State Park.

“I gained valuable skills in carpentry through building composting toilets at Waterbury Reservoir. I learned to be a leader. I can also see exactly how I can make a difference through conservation work - our crew has directly impacted the people who enjoy Vermont State Parks. I want to continue this kind of work and help to ensure that all people can have access to nature.”
Watershed Health: Class IV Erosion Projects (Statewide)
Project Sponsor: Department of Environmental Conservation
Three crews completed backroad projects in the Lamoille, Winooski, and White River basins to reduce erosion and phosphorous loading. Primarily, crews installed drainage structures to allow water to move off the roadway while leaving sediment behind. Crews installed 3 retaining walls, 4 check dams, 6 culverts, 8 grade dips, 15 armored drains, 16 rock aprons, and 67 water bars along 88 road stretches (5.5 miles). Capacity building support for watershed projects has been provided by the High Meadows Fund and the Lintilhac Foundation.

We all enjoyed the intellectual challenge. We had to find where the water was coming from, decide what drainage structure we needed in each area, and then build those structures. I knew nothing about algae blooms and how that was choking out native species, which is surprising because I’m from Vermont. It instilled a curiosity in me as to what else is going on in the environment.

Recreational Trails (Norwich)
Project Sponsors: Vermont Agency of Transportation, Norwich Land Management Council
Since 2008, the Norwich Land Management Council and VYCC have completed improvements on the Bill Ballard Trail. This vital trail is at the heart of the town’s extensive network that connects Gile Mountain, the Connecticut River, the Appalachian Trail, and the Silvio O. Conte National Fish and Wildlife Refuge. In 2015, a crew constructed a new 25’ bridge and replaced 3 existing bridges.
The Health Care Share (HCS) is a community-based public health project that connects Vermont families in need with a free, weekly supply of farm-fresh food at their doctor’s office. HCS members qualify for enrollment through their primary care provider on the basis of food-insecurity, low-income, diet-related disease and addiction recovery status. A University of Vermont Medical Center study shows that patients who participate in the HCS report increased fruit and vegetable intake, decreased prepared food intake, increased sense of overall health, and increased confidence cooking vegetables.

Since 2012, HCS has expanded to four major medical centers, served 880 families, and engaged nearly 200 youth. VYCC applies its youth crew model to all HCS sites by employing area youth and Crew Leaders.

In 2015, HCS distributed 90,800 pounds of food, to over 400 families, impacting approximately 1,600 individuals. HCS members received 15 shares over six months that included fresh, locally grown produce, two pasture-raised chickens, and newsletters containing nutrition information, tips, and recipes.

The Farm at VYCC continues to produce and distribute shares to members at Central Vermont and University of Vermont Medical Centers, both original HCS sites. A total of 300 weekly shares were distributed to member-families at 10 primary care clinics in Chittenden and Washington counties. Together, we
increased production and improved distribution systems, refined funding mechanisms, and enhanced services for HCS members.

The HCS at Rutland Regional Medical Center is led by Rutland native and VYCC alumna Heidi Lynch, Program Coordinator at the Vermont Farmers Food Center. The project served 75 families in 2015 and expects to enroll 125 in 2016. VYCC’s role is to provide consultation, as well as recruit and manage crews. Rutland HCS demonstrates that the HCS model is replicable and strengthened by participation from a local organization and community stakeholders.

Southwestern Vermont Medical Center (SVMC) piloted a 30-member HCS program to serve cardiac rehabilitation patients. In this model, food was purchased from a local farm, and VYCC provided project information and advice to the SVMC team. In 2016, VYCC expects to add a Bennington Community Crew, employing four area youth and a leader on this project.

A Health Care Share member describes the impact the program had on his family: “I’ve never had vegetables taste like this and I really haven’t cooked with them that much. But now, with what you’ve set up for my family, it’s changed our whole diet.”
Leaders Take Initiative

Heidi Lynch spent the summers of 2012 and 2013 on the Farm at VYCC, where as an AmeriCorps VISTA she helped launch the initial season of Health Care Shares with Central Vermont Medical Center.

A Rutland native, Heidi previously worked for Greg Cox, the owner of Boardman Hill Farm and founding President of Vermont Farmers Food Center. In 2013, Heidi began talking with Greg about her passion for the Health Care Share project, and Greg connected her to a grant opportunity through the Rutland Regional Medical Center's Bowse Health Trust.

The Vermont Farmers Food Center collaborated with VYCC and the Vermont Department of Vocational Rehabilitation to create a VYCC crew of Rutland-area youth who worked on local farms to grow and harvest vegetables for Health Care Shares.

Rutland partner farms are startup farms involved in Vermont Farmers Food Center’s Incubator Program: new farms operate on loaned lands of established farms so they have access to equipment and guidance of experienced farmers. Together, they achieved the quantity and quality of produce needed for Health Care Shares.
“The reception in the community has been tremendously successful, and inspiring to the farming community,” says Heidi. "We’re excited to expand the crew season, increase the number of shares, and work with a new farm in 2016.”

The crew is empowered by their participation in the field, visits to the Vermont Foodbank, going to the farmers market - getting the big picture. The fact that this is a crew made up of Rutland youth drives home the importance of this work, and makes them proud of what they do, and inspires them to continue to be a part of this work.

“In August, at the height of the season when there’s so much food to be harvested, food that we cultivated together all summer, the crew took the lead in helping each other and in keeping one another motivated. Because the crew had such an intimate understanding of the whole system, they were able to anticipate next steps and take the initiative to do what needed to be done.”

Elli, a summer Farm Crew member from Winooski High School, harvests radishes for Health Care Shares
Leaders Build Trust

Peter Nichols, School Instructor for the Mount Mansfield Union school crew, is proud of the progress his students have made:

“I have seen dramatic improvements in the reading abilities of my students. This comes from everyday practice and providing a safe space for students to learn. On Mondays we cook a meal in the kitchen. We talk about our weekends which builds trust and gets us set up for a place of learning. We established an open culture of feedback, both from me and from them, which has been really positive.”

A total of 41 youth across three school districts benefited from the High School Leadership Program in 2015. Curricula included writing and reading projects related to service, sustainable agriculture, forestry, and watersheds.

Students completed projects in erosion control, sugaring, fruit tree management, waste reduction and upcycling, wilderness first aid, animal tracking, and forestry. They also completed a unit on career readiness, and for most, this was their first time preparing for the workforce. These experiences not only introduced students to new skills, but gave them hands-on inspiration to conduct additional research, analysis, and reflection when they return to a traditional classroom.

FROM THE FIELD

Students pause construction of a chicken coop to take a picture with the partially finished structure
Hands-on learning has helped me to earn better grades. The skills I have after being a part of this program will hopefully help me get a job.

-Nathan

I learned a lot about being healthier and reading labels. Now I pay more attention to what I’m buying and look at the labels to understand what I’m eating.

-Cody

Two students work together to build a chicken coop

Students conduct water quality tests of a local stream
Leaders Build Community

Venture Semester is a new, immersive gap year program that offers inspiring, hands-on experiences in Vermont agriculture, food systems and public health to recent high school graduates. As a tuition-based program, Venture’s purpose is to prepare participants for future academic and career opportunities.

Corps Members enhance critical thinking and writing skills while learning what it means to live away from home, make new friends, and gain independence. VYCC works closely with Vermont Technical College, a member of the Vermont Higher Education Food Systems Consortium, to deliver this experience.

2015 Venture participants received unparalleled education from food producers, policy makers, journalists, professors, homesteaders, chefs, and doctors while completing service projects. They benefited from unique access to institutions of higher education.

For Tessie McDonnell, a Rutland native who enrolled after her summer as a Corps Member, Venture presented an opportunity to explore education and career options with a group of peers. “[After Venture] I don’t
think I could not go to college, I love to learn," says Tessie. "I want to learn about everything."

Venture Crew Leader Connor Magnuson shares this reflection on his crew's experience:

"Something happened halfway through. We started to learn about the intricacies of our community. Our little idiosyncrasies that made us love one another and at other times get a little annoyed. This is the compromise you make in a group as tight as we were. We started to notice when someone wasn’t feeling well, if someone was particularly emboldened today… Exhilarating, tiresome, revealing and so FUN!"
TEN YEARS AT THE WEST MONITOR BARN

Perhaps you are among the many generous individuals that made a gift to our 2005 capital campaign, attended one of the 100+ weddings held here to date, ran in Freaky 5K, skied Bolton to the Barns, or danced at a Denim and Diamonds fundraiser. Or perhaps you are among the 2,100 people that have volunteered on the Farm at VYCC. If so, you have contributed to:

- Year-round youth development programming
- 50 weeks of residential Crew Leader training on site
- Return of 20 acres to active, sustainable agricultural use, which has produced 317,000 pounds of vegetables and poultry
- Conservation of 400 acres within the Chittenden Uplands
- Generation of 375,363 KwH of solar electricity (and counting!)
In 2015, VYCC’s Board of Directors named VYCC’s home the Thomas L. Hark Leadership Campus. We also dedicated the Hay Mow (top floor of the West Monitor Barn) to former Board Chair David Conard. These two outstanding leaders join the following friends of VYCC whose contributions are acknowledged in and around the West Monitor Barn:

- Thomas P. Johnson – Trustee emeritus: Johnson Conservation Room
- Mitch and Kim Fleischer and family: the Fleischer Family Kitchen
- Caroline Wadhams Bennett – Founding Trustee: Caroline Wadhams Bennett Board Room
- Donald Bicknell – Volunteer: Bicknell Room
- Donors that made a gift of $1,000 or more to the capital campaign for the West Monitor Barn have an engraved brick in the courtyard

**LEAVE A LEGACY**

A gift this year supports today’s youth. We invite you to also support tomorrow’s youth by joining the Caroline Wadhams Bennett Stewardship Circle. We received the following note from our friend Meredith Babbott this year, along with a gift from her late husband David’s estate:

This note will confirm to you what you already know, that VYCC is a charitable recipient of a gift from my estate. I applaud the work you are doing with youth and for the environment in which they and we all live. To work outside, in the sun and the rain, in the woods or parks, moving rocks and changing water flow is healing and revealing to the mind, body, and spirit... However you use the gift, I have utmost confidence that it will be utilized wisely and well – and will continue to help teach individuals to take personal responsibility for all their actions.

To learn more about planned gifts, please contact Breck Knauft at 434-3969 ext. 110 or Breck.Knauft@vycc.org
### Summary of Revenues*

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*Unaudited figures as of 5/11/16

### Summary of Expenses

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*Unaudited figures as of 5/11/16
We are proud to complete educational fee-for-service projects in partnership with the following organizations:

AmeriCorps  
Catamount Trail Association  
Central Vermont Medical Center  
Champlain Valley Farmer Coalition  
Chester Conservation Commission  
Conservation Trust for North Carolina  
Cross Vermont Trail Association  
Ellerbe Creek Watershed Association  
Fairfax Recreation Department  
Friends of the West River Trail  
Fund for North Bennington  
Hunger Free Vermont  
Jay Community Land Trust  
Jericho Trails Committee  
Jericho Underhill Parks District  
Local Motion  
Montpelier Parks Department  
Mount Mansfield Union High School  
National Fish & Wildlife Foundation  
National Park Service  
NOFA-VT  
Norwich Land Management Council  
Our Community Cares Camp  

Putney Conservation Commission  
Putney Mountain Association  
Retreat Farm  
Richmond Family Medicine  
Salvation Farms  
SerVermont  
South Burlington Recreation & Parks Department  
Southwestern Vermont Medical Center  
The Nature Conservancy, Vermont Chapter  
Town of Colchester  
Town of St. Albans  
U-32 High School  
Unique Places, LLC  
US Army Corps of Engineers  
US Fish and Wildlife Service  
US Forest Service  
UVM Medical Center  
Vermont Agency of Transportation  
Vermont Association of Snow Travelers, Inc.  

Vermont Community Garden Network  
Vermont Department for the Blind & Visually Impaired  
Vermont Department of Environmental Conservation  
Vermont Department of Forests, Parks, & Recreation  
Vermont Division of Vocational Rehabilitation  
Vermont Farmers Food Center  
Vermont Foodbank  
Vermont Gleaning Collective  
Vermont River Conservancy  
Vermont Technical College  
Vermont Vegetable & Berry Growers Association  
Wake County Department of Parks & Recreation  
White River Partnership  
Winooski High School  
Winooski Valley Park District  
Woodstock High School
2015 LEADERSHIP GIVING

VYCC’s continued success would not be possible without the leadership and generosity of the following donors, who made significant investments in our organization and programs in 2015:

### $20,000 or more
- Canaday Family Charitable Trust
- The Gannett Family
- GDS Legacy Foundation
- George W. Mergens Foundation
- Gibney Family Foundation
- High Meadows Fund
- Jack & Dorothy Byrne Foundation
- Thomas P. Johnson
- Lintilhac Foundation
- Lookout Foundation
- Lyman Orton & Janice Izzi
- Serena Foundation

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- Anonymous
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- National Life Group Foundation

### New Visions Foundation
- Robert L. Crowell Charitable Fund
- George & Judy Russell
- S&C Harvest Foundation
- Sid & Cecelia Lance Family Foundation
- Elizabeth Steele
- The Sustainable Future Fund of the Vermont Community Foundation
- Amy E. Tarrant
- Vermont Women’s Fund
Thomas Hark is the Founding President of VYCC and served from 1986 until 2015. The following donors made gifts in his honor.

Susan & Jerry Adams
Stephen Anderson & Jacquelyn Walker
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Vermont State Employees Credit Union
Caroline Wadhams Bennett & Peter Bennett
John & Mary Wilson

The names of our Sustaining Donors have been bolded and italicized.
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