Mental Health First Aid: A Statewide Network of Prevention

DESCRIPTION
Mental Health First Aid is a public education program introducing people to the unique risk factors and warning signs of mental health problems. It builds an understanding of the importance of early intervention, and teaches how to help when a person is experiencing mental health challenges.

Last year, the VCP network and their community partners focused on providing in-person and virtual Teen, Youth and Adult Mental Health First Aid trainings and re-building our statewide infrastructure due to a loss of instructors during the pandemic. The VCP infrastructure has been primarily supported through The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) with additional support from the Vermont Department of Mental Health and most recently from the Agency of Education. The AOE support has enabled the network to focus on the provision of trainings in schools and to expand our teen trainings. “MHFA teaches teens in grades 10-12, or ages 15-18, how to identify, understand and respond to signs of mental health and substance use challenges among their friends and peers” (Mental Health First Aid).

IMPACT
Mental Health First Aid trainings have a direct impact on the wellness of our communities. Virtual trainings have allowed agencies to increase collaboration enabling the network to meet the training needs of communities throughout Vermont. As the mental health needs of our communities increased, VCP has seen an increased demand for Mental Health First Aid trainings, particularly for teen and youth. Since 2016, over 6,100 Vermonters have been trained as Teen, Youth or Adult Mental Health First Aiders by VCP agencies and their community partners.