

ANNUAL REPORT: JULY 1, 2023 – JUNE 30, 2024



Formerly, The Emergency Aid Association, Inc.
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Our Mission:

Suffield Community Aid (SCA) - *your local safety net*. SCA provides supportive health and social services that positively affect the well-being of Suffield residents during periods of need.

Brief Background:

SCA is a private, non-profit 501(c)3 social services agency. Incorporated in 1903, SCA is available for Suffield residents to make tough times more manageable. Since our inception, we have strived to enhance the full potential of all residents, and thereby, improve the overall quality of life in our community. Since 2003, the Town of Suffield has contracted with SCA to administer social services for its citizens. The current contract extends this partnership through June 30, 2027.

Our Focus:

Serving as a safety net for residents experiencing financial and other challenges, residents reach out to SCA when they don't know where else to turn. Whether you've lost a job, suffered a health crisis, required help caring for an aging parent, or experienced some type of financial hardship, *SCA is here to offer the resources and support that community members require to move forward in their lives.*

Through individualized consultations, the SCA team helps residents achieve self-sufficiency, preserve economic well-being, and adjust to difficult circumstances and events in their lives. By combining our ability to offer immediate relief programs with other government and private resources, we are able to maximize eligibilities and alleviate hardships to promote better overall individual and family functioning.

Highlights of FY 2024:

Listed below are some of the supportive health and social service programs provided by SCA for residents during fiscal year 2023 - 2024. SCA continued to provide in-person services by meeting with residents at SCA, in the community, and in residents' homes.

Health and Wellness Supports- In FY 2024- SCA saw consistent use of our Health and Wellness supports. A majority of our support groups were steadily attended, and we provided screenings to similar numbers of residents as we did in FY 23. We lent almost the same amount of medical equipment as the previous year. Some health and wellness programs experienced growth. The Choices volunteer counselor provided 17% more consults and we delivered 13% more meals through Meals-on-Wheels (MOW).

- ◆ **After-Hours SPD Support Plan & Town Emergency Responder Assistance-** SCA continues to work closely with SPD, SVAA, and the SFD to ensure resident safety and well-being should a fuel, food or housing crisis occur during non-SCA work hours. SCA also partners with the Town's Emergency Responders to assist residents experiencing serious health & housing challenges.
- ◆ **Bereavement Support Group-** SCA hosted 2 bi-annual grief support groups. Each group was 6 weeks and was led by Masonicare Hospice and Bereavement Therapist. These were open to both Suffield and surrounding towns' residents.
- ◆ **CHOICES Counseling-** A trained SCA volunteer, Sheri Burger, provided 174 in-person appointments and assistance to individuals looking to explore their Medicare options.
- ◆ **Digital Mobile Mammography-** SCA organized a mobile mammography event at McAlister Intermediate School that served 8 women.
- ◆ **Friendly Visitor/ Friendly Caller-** The Program was reestablished by the SCA Social Work Intern and the SCA Outreach Worker. Recruitment and vetting of 12 volunteers was followed by three training sessions and eight successful matches to isolated elders. Volunteers have committed themselves to at least one hour per week for at least six months. The SCA Outreach Worker is available during that time to support the matches.
- ◆ **Meals-On-Wheels-** SCA coordinates volunteers who distributed 8,808 government subsidized meals to 67 medically frail, homebound seniors in FY24.
- ◆ **Medical Equipment Loans-** 397 donated durable medical items were loaned to residents and/or their family members.
- ◆ **Medical & Health Promotion Subsidies-** SCA subsidized medical services and related programming in the amount of \$4,919. In partnership with Masonicare, SCA sponsored bi-weekly blood pressure screening clinics, which were accessed 311 times by Suffield residents.
- ◆ **Memory Café Support Group-** The Café is based on a social model for those with cognitive loss and their friends and family. Because of a decline in attendance in the last six months, despite being synchronized with the Dementia Caregiver Support Group, SCA will explore partnering with the Alzheimer's Association in the future to boost viability of the Café.
- ◆ **Parkinson's Peer Support-** SCA facilitated an in-person support group for caregivers and individuals with Parkinsons. This year the program moved from the Suffield Senior Center to SCA's office. The group met monthly from September through June and welcomed several guest presenters for information-sharing purposes. The group averaged 10 members who regularly attended each meeting.
- ◆ **Preschool Vision Screenings-** In partnership with the Suffield Lions Club, SCA volunteers completed 91 screenings across 3 in-town pre-schools.

- ◆ **Resident At-Risk List**- SCA partners with the Town’s Emergency Preparedness team to identify vulnerable residents. This list continues to be an instrumental tool across several town emergency response departments.
- ◆ **Social Service Consultations**- Staff had another busy year and responded to thousands of requests for information and provided comprehensive case assessment, case management, networking, referral information and consultation to 442 Suffield households. Often the consults led to active partnership with residents and worker in obtaining information, applying for services, and monitoring the progress of those referrals.
- ◆ **Transportation, Mental Health, & Adult Day Care Subsidies**- SCA offered subsidies to help qualified residents get to where they want to go, (when the Suffield Mini-Bus is not available), obtain the clinical help they require, and explore the benefits of adult day care, by instituting programs to offset prohibitive costs. A total of 38 transportation subsidies and two Adult Day Care subsidies were provided to low-income residents, totaling \$8,794.

Financial Supports- In FY 2024, SCA saw growth in most of our financial support programs. We provided more crisis funding, distributed more holiday baskets and tripled the spending in our home repair program. Perhaps due to a warmer winter, we saw slightly less usage of fuel aid. Our food pantry experienced a 20% increase in usage and more seniors accessed their subsidized meals at the senior center.

- ◆ **COVID-19/Crisis Relief Fund**- This special fund was created in March 2020, thanks to donations received from the larger community. The fund targets assistance to residents who do not qualify for other needs-based or COVID relief programs. Funds are also utilized to help residents in crisis who qualify and to secure short-term, temporary emergency housing in instances where other options are not available. Four households were assisted at a cost of \$5,684.
- ◆ **Fiore Food Pantry**- SCA’s Food Pantry saw increased use in FY 2024, especially by Seniors. It was accessed 481 times by 142 different Suffield families. The households were comprised of 1,045 persons, of whom 374 were children and 256 were over the age of 65. The value of the food and gift card assistance is estimated at \$56,132.
 - ◆ **“Grab-and-Go” Mini Food Pantry**- Just outside the SCA door, this self-serve resource is available to any resident needing urgent food assistance at any time of day. Although we don’t track usage, this fiscal year we had to refill it more frequently than before to keep up with demand.
 - ◆ **Pet Food Support**- Fundraising efforts and frequent donations help make it possible for SCA’s Food Pantry to continue offering pet food.
 - ◆ **Vegetable Garden**- In FY24 the SCA Garden has continued to yield a significant bounty of produce that is shared with SCA clients facing food insecurity. The garden provided fresh produce, flowers, and herbs a few times a week during the summer months.
- ◆ **Fuel Assistance**- \$42,913 in critical fuel aid was distributed to 73 Suffield households from various SCA-administered funds (\$6,460 was expended from SCA Private Fuel donations.). An additional 234 energy applications were submitted to the State of CT on behalf of our residents, resulting in \$175,840 in fuel aid for approved households.
- ◆ **Holiday Basket Program**- SCA coordinated the distribution of 220 donated holiday baskets to low-income households.
- ◆ **Housing Repair Assistance Program**- The Housing Repair Assistance Program was established at SCA in 2022 to provide necessary home repairs and modifications to low-to-moderate income homeowners. In its first full year in operation, SCA saw substantial growth in this program and served six households. In FY 2024, SCA contributed \$100,047 towards improving the safety, accessibility, and security of several homes in Suffield.
- ◆ **Meal Subsidies**- SCA offered lunch subsidies for qualified seniors and adults with disabilities to enjoy lunch at the Senior Center twice per week. This program subsidized 1,709 meals for 38 residents at a total cost of \$8,545.

- ◆ **Renter's Rebate**- Between July 1, 2023 through June 30, 2024, staff processed 106 applications and submitted a claim to the Office of Policy and Management for \$53,481 to be dispersed to Suffield elderly and disabled qualified renters.
- ◆ **Quality of Life Fund**- Social services workers make referrals for items, programs and/or services that would enhance a resident's quality of life but would otherwise be financially prohibitive. 17 residents were served at a cost of \$9,924. Additionally, SCA funded one, 8-week "Low Mobility" Exercise Series that served more than 20 older adults at a cost of \$640.
 - ◆ *Housing Expenses*: SCA serves as the hub for FEMA distributed "Emergency Food and Shelter" funds as well as Salvation Army funding. In FY24, 6 households were assisted using these funds, totaling \$4,059 in assistance.
- ◆ **Salvation Army**- The Salvation Army Kettle Drive raised \$2,344 thanks to the time and efforts of community members, the SHS Interact Club, SHS Best Buddies and the Suffield Rotary. These funds provide for basic needs & costs associated with SCA's annual "Return to School Backpack" Program.
- ◆ **Veterans' Assistance**- The Suffield Knights of Columbus & Landry Sic VFW Post 9544 provided funding to meet the needs of Suffield Veterans experiencing financial and medical hardships. Five veterans were served at a cost of \$2,200.

Children and Youth Support- In FY 2024- SCA saw growth in all our programming related to youth. We subsidized more camperships, added new scholarships, increased existing scholarship award amounts, distributed more backpacks and provided more Meghan Voisine "Kindness Grants."

- ◆ **Camperships/Child Care Subsidies**- Campership/childcare subsidies doubled in growth. 49 subsidies were provided to 33 children living in low-income earning homes, to attend camp or help subsidize childcare expenses, at a cost of \$10,345.
- ◆ **Forward Focus**- Forward Focus is a partnering program to help launch Suffield teens and young adults. This program addresses financial and other challenges that impede the attainment of life goals for identified Suffield youth and young adults. Seven teenage residents were assisted at a cost of \$5,512.26.
- ◆ **Meghan Voisine Fund**- The Meghan Voisine Fund was created in memory of Meghan Voisine to support Suffield youth-based programming and initiatives. "Kindness Grants" were distributed to selected applicants and youth groups to fund their community-based projects. A total of \$5,068 was awarded to several applicants and youth groups to complete their projects of spreading kindness and promoting inclusion in Suffield.
- ◆ **"Return to School" Backpack Distribution**- In September 2023, SCA distributed 78 prefilled backpacks to financially qualified school-age children. School supplies were obtained with funds raised through our local Salvation Army Kettle Drive and through the generous support of Sacred Heart Church and individual donors.
- ◆ **Scholarships and Awards**
 - ◆ **Forward Focus Scholarships**- Created in 2024, the SCA Board of Directors established this \$1,500 scholarship to offer graduating Suffield High School seniors financial support as they pursue job and educational goals post-graduation. These need-based scholarships are offered to seniors who have committed to a trade or vocational school, 2 or 4-year colleges, or other identified job readiness programs. In 2024, SCA awarded this scholarship to two graduating seniors.
 - ◆ **Kathy Ostrowski Memorial Nursing Scholarship**- In honor of SCA's beloved former Board member, Kathy Ostrowski, a scholarship created in her name is awarded to a Suffield High School graduating senior who is pursuing a nursing degree. In FY 2024, the scholarship

award was increased to \$1,500. In 2024, SCA awarded this scholarship to one graduating senior.

- ◆ **James Coggins, Jr. Community Service Award**- In memory of our late volunteer and Board Member, SCA offers a \$1,500 award to a graduating Suffield high school senior who's demonstrated selflessness, generosity, and concern for the community through their volunteer activities. In FY 2024, the scholarship award was increased to \$1,500. In 2024, SCA awarded this scholarship to one graduating senior.

- ◆ **Jane Purtil Memorial Scholarship Award**- In recognition of Jane Purtil Fuller, a longtime supporter of SCA, a \$1,500 scholarship is granted in her honor each year. It is awarded to a graduating Suffield high-school senior pursuing a nursing or social service field of study. In FY 2024, the scholarship award was increased to \$1,500. In 2024, SCA awarded this scholarship to one graduating senior.

SCA experienced significant growth and change this year. We completed renovations to our office, program and storage space, allowing for greater efficiency, access and privacy. We also had a transition in leadership when I joined the agency in May, following Danielle Annibalini's departure. Our Friendly Visitor program resumed, and our home repair program expanded significantly. What didn't change was that the demand for SCA services remained strong, with most programs seeing consistent usage and several experiencing substantial increases. We are so proud to support the residents of Suffield. We couldn't do it without the commitment of our volunteers, the hard work and valuable experience of our staff, the guidance and wisdom of the Board of Directors, and the generosity of our community partners and donors. As Helen Keller once said "Alone we can do so little; together we can do so much."

Respectfully Submitted,

Mary Curtin, MSW
Executive Director

