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Executive Summary

The Community Renewal Team, Inc. is the oldest, continually operating community action agency in the country and the largest in the state of Connecticut. Incorporated in 1963, CRT is a 501(c)3 organization. CRT's catchment area encompasses the Greater Hartford and Middlesex counties. CRT's mission is, "Preparing the Community to Meet Life's Challenges," and is committed to helping people meet their basic needs while promoting and supporting self-sufficiency. CRT takes a holistic approach in developing individualized service plans for our customers. As the name implies, we are connected to our community, respected as a social service provider, and trusted by those who turn to us for assistance and know that they will be treated with dignity and respect, and provided with services to assist them with gaining self-sufficiency. CRT administers a wide array of programs including: Early Care and Education (Head Start, School Readiness, Infant & Toddler); Behavioral Health Services; Emergency Shelters; Residential and Housing Assistance; Energy Assistance and Weatherization; Elderly Nutrition (congregate and Meals on Wheels); Senior Programming; Supportive Housing; Veteran Services and Housing; Employment Training and Placement Services; Community Justice Programs; Asset Development/Economic Literacy Programs and Neighborhood and Suburban Outreach Multi-Services.

Community Renewal Team, Inc. (CRT) Greater Hartford Retired and Senior Volunteer Program (GHRVSP) presents unique opportunities for people, age 55 years and older, to actively participate in all phases of services within the CRT community. GHRVSP meets community needs by matching volunteers by their knowledge, skills, and talents to meaningful, coordinated and organized volunteerism activities which enhance their lives and the lives of those they serve. The GHRVSP program also enhances a multitude of CRT's programs by supporting volunteers who provide a vast number of services to many of CRT's clients.

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Strengthening Communities

Research has shown a direct correlation between educational attainment, income and quality of life (Muller, 2002 and U.S. Census, July 2002), i.e., the more education, the higher the income, and the better the quality of life. In Connecticut, 88.4% of the population 25 years of age or older earned a high school diploma or higher. This percentage is substantially greater than Hartford's 67.9%; however, Hartford's percentage increased 0.8% since 2011. The gap widens when considering an earned bachelor's degree and higher. Statewide 35.2% earned a bachelors degree or higher compared to Hartford's 13.3%, a decrease of 0.3% compared to 2011. Hartford, by far, is the least educated of the 40 towns served by CRT.

The level of education that a child achieves can be directly correlated to several indicators throughout childhood. Indicators such as child poverty, family income, parental employment, and homeownership influence a child's perspective in life and his/her expectations pertaining to personal achievements. Investing in the development of children can yield extraordinary returns to the community. The quality of life for a child (and the contribution the child makes to his/her community) impact personal academic success or failure, financial independence or reliance on the state, and the overall well-being and future of that child. To understand how to improve the lives of children and families, factors affecting children must be examined.

Examining how many young children currently live in poverty and where they live is an important step in identifying and assisting many of Connecticut's most at-risk children. According to the U.S. Census (ACS, 2006-2010), 12%, of all Connecticut children 18 years of age and younger live in poverty. Children in poverty are extremely vulnerable. Poverty impacts many health and social issues and can lead to unhealthy living conditions, inadequate nutrition, a stressful home environment,

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lower educational attainment, and developmental problems that can have life-long negative effects. Although Connecticut has the second lowest child poverty rate in the nation, (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2012), 51% of Hartford's related children 5 and younger, and 44% of related children 18 and younger live in poverty (U.S. Census, ACS 2006-2010).

Income influences families within individual communities and across Connecticut. Income speaks to a family's ability to afford expenses such as food, shelter, clothing, health care, transportation, and education-related costs. Research has demonstrated a strong relationship between socioeconomic status and children's educational attainment and social connection. Children in a lower socioeconomic status household are typically at a disadvantage as families are not always able to provide an environment conducive to learning and educational advancement. The federal poverty level is \$23,050 for a family of four (U. S. HHS 2012). For a Connecticut family to afford necessities, it is estimated that the household income must be roughly double the federal poverty level for a family of four (\$44,100). For many Connecticut families, reaching this standard of living is a struggle given that two full-time workers (40 hours a week for 52 weeks) earning the current minimum wage (\$8.25/hour) would generate \$34,320 in annual income. Connecticut continues to be one of the richest states in the country, and in many communities, the median household income extends well beyond \$100,000. There is, however, great disparity in income between the state's 169 municipalities and among CRTs 40 towns. For example, the median family income in Madison is \$108,175 while in Hartford the median income is only \$28,970 (American Community Survey, 2006-2010).

To qualify for free lunch, a student's family income must be below 130 percent of the federal poverty level. For students to receive reduced priced lunch the income level must be between 130 and 185 percent of the poverty level, up to \$54,000 for a family of six. In Hartford, 93.3% of students qualify

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for free/reduced lunch, Manchester is 46.9%, and East Hartford is 62.9%.

Although all of these indicators play a role in the level of educational attainment that a child achieves, there are many programs and factors that can help a child despite facing these many obstacles.

Children develop their capacities - learning, responsibility, trust, confidence, collaboration, and altruism through guided interaction with teachers, parents and their peers. They experiment, make friends, try to please others, take advice, and in short, develop their social skills to interact with peers and adults. Children must have access to stimuli, environments, and conditions that lay the foundation for their development -- cognitive, emotional/social, physical, linguistic, and health.

CRT's America Reads volunteer program helps children develop their capacities through a mentoring/tutoring program at a total of seven different volunteer stations throughout some of the neediest schools in CRT's service area. RSVP volunteers work with students in grades K-5. The students are identified through school personnel (reading specialists, teachers) as having low-reading scores. The "Developmental Reading Assessment" tests are also given to all students entering school, and the results are used to evaluate the students ability as well. The volunteers work one-on-one and/or in groups with the students for approximately 2.5 hours per week for a total of 40 weeks a year. Activities include practicing reading, readiness skills, reading aloud, blending letters, sounding out new words, and learning their meaning in context. Activities are used to reinforce the connection between reading and writing, including letter recognition and writing practices. Spelling and written assignments are corrected and discussed with the volunteer tutors. Due to the America Reads program, students receiving tutoring demonstrate an increased interest and ability in reading by the end of the first semester of the school year. They also improve their reading abilities, with many reading at or above grade level by the end of the year. The students overall social skills, attention

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spans, and classroom behavior improve. America Reads programs are held during the school hours and do not conflict with basic studies or mandated activities.

America Read volunteers receive 1 training session per year. Self-directed training sessions are also provided and include videotapes from America Reads and Bank Street College of Education. The training sessions are conducted by School Social Workers, School Reading Consultants, and Teachers.

In addition to a strong focus in the area of Education, the GHRSVP program also has significant activity in the service to veterans focus area as well as to military families. GHRSVP will be implementing two new volunteer programs where the services will be directed toward veterans and military families. For the past year, CRT has had an Americorp VISTA that has worked solely on researching and designing a Resource Manual for Veterans within the state of CT. This manual is a resource guide for Veterans that are looking for any range of services, including housing, benefits, counseling, employment, and much more. GHRSVP volunteers will be trained in the use of the manual and will present it at various senior centers, homeless shelters, as well as health fairs throughout CT. The volunteers will also be available to set up one-on-one meetings with Veterans, as needed.

GHRSVP will also be implementing a new volunteer program, in collaboration with the American Red Cross, that will serve military families. GHRSVP volunteers will be making follow-up phone calls to military families to inquire about their satisfaction with using the Red Cross SAF emergency messaging system in order to contact their deployed family member in the event of an emergency. These phone calls will assess family satisfaction as well as obtain any information that the family may have to help improve the system and if the family would use the system again and/or recommend it

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to a friend.

Recruitment and Development

Outreach and community development are the basis for meaningful volunteer opportunities that impact community needs and provide quality experiences for RSVP volunteers. As a successful volunteer program in the community, RSVP has made a name for itself, and recruiting is not a major deterrent to the program. Recruitment is an on-going process, both with CRT and GHRSVP. RSVP is able to utilize CRT's extensive connections with the local grassroots community, faith-based organizations, and partners to help recruit senior volunteers as well as the growing number of baby boomers. Recruitment is also done through other programs sponsored by CRT including senior community centers, senior housing, and congregate meal sites through the distribution of flyers, posters, and word of mouth. The volunteers themselves also refer individuals to the program. We try to develop new programs for younger and more experienced volunteers, yet keep services that impact the lives of our older volunteers. RSVP baby boomers account for 10% of the total volunteers.

Many of our programs are self-sufficient, and staff does the recruitment. The Vernon Reads Program Senior Volunteer Coordinator recruits once a year in the Journal Inquirer and Hartford Courant. Reporters are invited to run feature stories during our September recruitment period. A recent feature story just ran this past September in the Journal Inquirer and Hartford Courant that generated 40 phone calls within a 3 day period. Some schools promote the program through their newsletter and letters to parents, as well as on school bulletins. Coordinators also use local churches and have had great success. Furthermore, the program utilizes an on-line recruitment tool called "Volunteer Match," in which we register our volunteer opportunities online and seniors who are interested can use the tool to contact the program.

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Volunteers are formally recognized annually for their efforts through Recognition Luncheons, as a way to publicize volunteer efforts and to retain volunteers. At these recognitions, volunteers are presented with a gift of appreciation from staff. Many volunteers also attend individual station recognitions and are given letters or certificates of appreciation for their work. Volunteers are also recognized during the year through regular visits to stations and special meetings.

Development of our program is a continuing process in conjunction with the volunteer stations. The program assures a high quality experience for volunteers that offer opportunities for building new skills, developing leadership, and enhancing volunteers lives. Through on-going on-site training, station staff provides specialized training that allows volunteers to acquire new knowledge and skills. For example, America Reads provides in-service trainings to volunteers and Bradley Airport provides security training. CATCH volunteers receive regular training on health and nutrition as well. Furthermore, there are conferences and networking sessions that require attendance from volunteers which help us to remain current on upcoming and new trends in volunteering. It is increasingly important that the quality of stations and volunteer work requested provide meaningful volunteer experiences and utilize the best skills from our volunteers.

Professional training is offered on an on-going basis to all staff, and in many cases, is required by CRT. As space is available, volunteers are encouraged to attend CRT sponsored trainings. Staff and volunteers also take advantage of locally sponsored "free" workshops and trainings to further professional development. Volunteers attend volunteer station sponsored training as they pertain to their duties. Staff attend state, local, and national trainings and conferences as applicable. RSVP is also actively engaged in efforts to develop initiatives that meet the varied needs of the "boomer generation" that are now either in or nearing retirement age.

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Program Management

The GHRSVP Program has a full-time Program Director who has over 25 years of experience with implementing services to seniors. She is responsible for the overall implementation of GHRSVP as well as CRT's Senior Outreach Program. GHRSVP also has a full-time Program Coordinator who assists the Director. There is also a part-time Senior Outreach Coordinator that works within RSVP as well as the Senior Outreach Program. All have experience working with the elderly and have served on many boards and programs that support services for the elderly.

The GHRSVP Program Director has been operating the RSVP program at CRT since its inception. She has extensive experience with operating an RSVP program as well knowledge of the rules and regulations associated with the program. With the help of the Program Coordinator, all Volunteer Stations are monitored on a regular basis to ensure that these rules are being followed and that all volunteers are following the prescribed activities set forth in each individual work plan. Both staff are also well trained and have vast experience with collecting and measuring outputs and outcomes and will continue to be responsible to ensure that all performance measure outcomes and outputs are tracked properly and either met or exceeded.

The Program Director and Program Coordinator are also responsible for working with CRT's Planning Team to develop new volunteer work plans and work stations. GHRSVP will be operating many programs that will be outside of its primary focus area of education. The design of these programs is a joint effort between program staff and planning staff, in conjunction with the volunteers stations, to ensure that the programs are feasible and that they will be successful. These programs are designed to meet the ever growing needs of the community that we serve. CRT's Research Department undertakes a community needs assessment every 3 years and organizational self-assessments yearly.

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Through surveys, focus groups, and interviews, information is gathered from selected individuals living within the community and representatives of service agencies. The assessment is used to evaluate CRT programming, including RSVP, and to improve on services. In addition, the community is represented on CRT's Board of Trustees that sets agency policy and provides direction to the President and Senior Executives. CRT's board structure is a tri-partite composition with members representing public and private sectors of the community and neighborhood representation. This helps to ensure that all CRT programming is geared towards the actual needs as expressed by the community itself. On top of the Community Needs Assessment and per our Federal and State Guidelines, RSVP conducts an annual survey that assesses volunteers and the volunteer stations for their impact on the RSVP program, the community, and volunteers.

CRT has a long established record of fiscal and payroll management and receives funding from multiple sources including Federal, State, towns, foundations, the private sector, and individuals. The Agency's annual operating budget exceeds \$83 million in direct and supportive services. The complex compliance requirements of its many programs require that CRT maintain strong accounting systems and controls. Presently, CRT tracks approximately 150 funds which the system reconciles daily and closes monthly. GHRSVP has been fortunate in obtaining more than the obligated Federal Match and receiving financial donations. The Program Director has experience with reaching various donors and requesting in-kind contributions such as food, space, and program materials, as well as cash donations to sustain the program.

Partnerships with community organizations and the towns/cities where we provide services allow us to do more with fixed resources and enhance the important work that we do. The GHRSVP has many partnerships with various organizations, including: the CT Department of Transportation, CT Radio

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Information System, The State of CT Attorney General's Office, Meals on Wheels Programs, 7 schools in Vernon, Middletown, and Manchester, Hartford Hospital, the American Red Cross, and the OASIS Institute. Partners are selected by the information that they provide as well as the availability of meaningful volunteer opportunities. The partnerships help us to coordinate services, disseminate educational information, mentor and tutor, and contribute to the health of seniors. Volunteers help enhance the capacity of CRT by improving the quality of services, expanding the types of services available, increasing the number of individuals served, and sharing their experiences and expertise.

As the GHRSVP Program is continuing to grow and evolve in order to meet the new guidelines set forth by CNCS as well as the needs of the community, GHRSVP will have to graduate a couple of work stations that were a part of the program in the past. GHRSVP will be graduating the "Bloomfield Music Makers" as well as the "Ellington Singers." Although these two groups provide a valuable service to the community with their musical productions at various senior centers, nursing homes, and assisted living communities, they no longer align with the priorities set forth by CNCS. Upon graduation from the GHRSVP Program, these two musical groups will be supported by the Bloomfield and Ellington Senior Centers respectively. Both groups already held all group meetings at the senior centers and this is an obvious and easy transition for them. The senior centers have agreed to reimburse the volunteers for mileage as well.

GHRSVP has several groups of knitters that make hats and warm winter clothing items for the hospitals as well as for the infants and children in CRT's Early Care and Education Program. Although GHRSVP will be able to keep some of the knitting groups through the Other Community Priorities Focus Area, we will not be able to keep all groups. GHRSVP chose to keep the groups with the most active members and will graduate the remaining groups out of the RSVP Program. This will

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be an easy transition for these groups, because CRT will keep them on as volunteers for the organization rather than volunteers for RSVP and they will continue to be able to knit and provide clothing for the organization as well as be recognized and appreciated.

Lastly, GHRSVP will be graduating volunteers/volunteer stations within the Senior Outreach Program. The volunteers at St. Michael's Place and Coventry Place will continue to be invited to activities held at The Retreat. Individual's at the other senior housing communities will be encouraged to still plan social activities within their community as well as to attend activities hosted at their local senior centers.

Organizational Capability

The Community Renewal Team has extensive experience in delivering community-based services to the entire community as well as to persons 55 years and older. CRT employs more than 800 individuals, uses roughly 1,100 volunteers, and serves approximately 114,000 individuals in 131 cities and towns. CRT administers more than 65 human service programs including three of the largest programs in the state: Early Care and Education, Elderly Nutrition, and Energy Assistance.

The Greater Hartford RSVP Program has a full-time Program Director, who has over 25 years of experience with 2 RSVP programs. She is responsible for the overall program implementation as well as supervising staff and volunteers, completing program reports, attending meetings with funders and volunteer station coordinators, and assisting with the recruitment and development of volunteers and management of volunteer stations. The Program Director has coordinated services with town halls, senior services, local schools, and community organizations to develop meaningful volunteer placements based on an assessment of the volunteer's knowledge, skills, and talents.

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GHRVSP has a full-time Coordinator who assists the Program Director, collects data, administers surveys, and provides technical assistance to station coordinators. She also coordinates the CATCH Healthy Habits program. Both the Program Director and the Program Coordinator have experience working with the elderly and have served on many boards and programs that support services for the elderly. Program staff are located at The Retreat, an affordable assisted living complex for seniors aged 55 years and older, and CRT's Coventry Place, an Independent Living Senior Housing Complex. The Retreat provides the perfect location for staff to recruit volunteers, connect volunteers with services, and provide staff with support. The program has 8 non-paid Volunteer Team Leaders that help to support the America Reads Program.

CRT has a long established record of fiscal management. The Agency's annual operating budget exceeds \$83 million from approximately 150 funding sources including Federal, State, towns, foundations, the private sector, and individuals that provide direct and supportive services to the area's low-income and disadvantaged populations. The complex compliance requirements of many funding sources require CRT to maintain strong accounting systems and controls. The Agency is capable of controlling and safeguarding funds by funding source, specific funding contract, and cost category; it ensures adequate expenditure levels and audit trails. CRT has an automated financial accounting system that is specifically designed to track large numbers of grants and contracts on a full fund accounting basis, reconcile daily, and close monthly.

GHRVSP has been fortunate in obtaining more than the obligated Federal Match, and receiving financial donations. The Program Director has experience with reaching various donors requesting in-kind contributions such as food, space cost, and program materials, as well as cash donations to sustain the program. Program staffs are located at the Retreat, an affordable assisted living complex

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for seniors 62 years and older. The Retreat provides the perfect location for staff to recruit volunteers, connect volunteers with services, in-kind office space, and staff support. CRT also has a 10-person Planning Department that supports Agency programs by maintaining funding resources and locating new funding streams. GHRSVP receives additional funding from 1 DOT grant, and from the Oasis Institute/Anthem Blue Cross and Blue Shield.

CRT's RSVP program is assessed for quality assurance through a survey administered by the RSVP Advisory Council for its accomplishments and effectiveness. The Advisory Council consists of RSVP Volunteers, representatives from various stations, Directors of Volunteers, and community leaders. The Advisory Council meets monthly and takes an active part in all programs and recognitions. The data from the surveys is used to assess the effectiveness of our efforts and assurance compliance with program goals and community needs. Furthermore, GHRSVP also uses the National RSVP Reporter software to collect and report on the number of volunteer stations, number of volunteers recruited for each station, and number of volunteer hours. The GHRSVP Director, Supervisors of Volunteer Stations, and Volunteer Coordinators collect the data for the National RSVP Reporter.

Other

Hartford is the largest urban city and the Capital of Connecticut. The 2010 U.S. Census identified Hartford as one of the poorest cities in the nation with a reported 32.1% of Hartford residents living below the poverty line, whereas the level for the state as a whole is 9.2%. The same data revealed that the Hartford Metropolitan Statistical Area, an area including Hartford and 57 surrounding towns, had the fifth highest median income, and the ninth highest per capita income among the nation's metropolitan areas. However, as the urban center, Hartford has one of the highest poverty rates and is officially the second poorest city of 100,000 people. Poverty is much worse among Hartford's children 18 years of age and younger compared to the state, 44.2% and 12%, respectively. Even more

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staggering is the 51.1% of Hartford children 5 years of age and younger living in poverty, compared to 12% of all children in Connecticut. The current unemployment rate of 17.8% (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, August 2012) is 8.8% higher than the state unemployment rate of 9%. Hartford also has a reputation of high violence and crime. According to the 2010 Connecticut Department of Public Safety Uniform Crime Reports, Hartford was more than double any other geographic area, and far exceeded the state rate. Hartford's crime rate per 100,000 people is 7,119.

To prepare our community for a brighter future, we need to increase opportunities for individuals to receive services as well as provide opportunities for individuals to help. However, recruiting volunteers to work in Hartford is extremely challenging due to Hartford's local reputation of high violence and crime. The CATCH Healthy Habits program is helping to alleviate this ongoing problem, as all of the program/volunteer sites have been located directly within the city of Hartford. The GHRSVP Program has been designed to appeal to and recruit younger volunteers, i.e. "baby boomers." The idea is for volunteers to work in teams, which in turn makes volunteering in an urban environment more comfortable for the younger volunteers. By doing this, we are engaging volunteers to work within an urban community by making them feel more confident and comfortable. Additionally, this program is relying on the collaborative efforts of over 7 local, regional, and national organizations. This team building and collaboration takes a significant amount of time and resources to ensure that all are working together to achieve the same goal.

PNS Amendment (if applicable)

N/A