

SNAP (3SquaresVT) helps put food on the table for 1 in 6 Vermonters.

Here are some of their stories.

“I have two kids who are six and three. My fiancée (their father) also lives with us, but is unable to work right now until he can get his shoulder operated on...he has been going through physical therapy and now has to wait for a surgery date. I don't know how we would make it without our 3SquaresVT benefits every month. We are on waiting lists for housing, which are forever, so are responsible for our full cost of rent. Recently our car also died, so we have a car payment every month now. When I pay my bills after each paycheck I am lucky if I have \$50 left over to last us another two weeks. Times are defiantly very hard, but I know I don't have to worry about how I am going to be able to feed my children. Luckily, my son gets breakfast and lunch at school and then a snack after school, but my daughter is in daycare and I have to pack her lunch every day which gets expensive. I am a very hard working person and have a decent job, but with all of our other expenses and other circumstances that are out of our hands, 3Squares is greatly needed! Thank you!”

“An 82-year-old man came by the office and hesitatingly asked if he could talk to someone, because he only had seven dollars to his name and didn't know how he could make it until the end of the month. He said he can usually “get by” but his car had to be fixed or he wouldn't be able to drive down to White River Junction for his doctor's appointment next week. He went on that he had “never asked for no help...not ever” and thought that maybe it would be okay now, because, after all, he had served in WWII and the Korean War. I sat down with him and we completed a 3SVT application. He had all his monthly expenses written down on a piece of cardboard. He receives \$975 a month in Social Security benefits. Within two weeks he phoned m, when he had received his first notice from the State requesting the required telephone interview, and he wondered if I could help him with that, because “I get awful nervous about that kind of thing.” We arranged an appointment to make the call and when he arrived at the office he was carrying a box. We went into the small conference room and he pulled out his discharge papers from the wars he served in along with two photos of himself in military uniform. He looked across the table at me and said, “I brought all this to prove to you that I did serve our country and I never asked for any help ‘til now.” He called me less than a week later to tell me how grateful he is and that he thinks he “might be able to get by better now.” He said, “In fact, I'm gonna drive over and see my sister this weekend. She's awful sick and I couldn't go see her 'cause I couldn't afford the gas.” He is eligible for \$200 in 3SVT benefits.”

“An elderly couple came to my office one morning looking for help because they just didn't have enough money to get them through the month. They had owned a farm for a number of years and were forced to sell off some of their land to make ends meet. This money was gone, and now they were struggling to meet their basic needs. I told them about “food stamps” and helped them apply. They were reluctant because of pride and felt “someone else needed it more.” Based on their income they received nearly the maximum monthly amount. Whenever they receive paperwork from the state regarding a review of their benefits they come to my office early in the morning to say hello and ask me to help them complete the necessary forms. They don't want to “fill it out wrong,” because they appreciate the help the monthly benefit provides and realize it is part of their safety net along with the supplemental fuel assistance they receive. The couple is just maintaining their modest lifestyle with this help, and any decrease in these crucial programs could send them into a downward spiral that may jeopardize their health and wellbeing.”

“An older gentleman came in my office about five months ago to get information about 3SquaresVT. His wife is in the hospital with an emotional illness, and he has never received state benefits before. He was struggling to put food on his table, as his expenses were increasing. After hearing about 3SquaresVT, he wanted to apply, and we completed his application online. He was very happy when he was approved. He came back to say thank you for helping. He is only receiving \$75 a month, but he told me that it was great to be able to eat a good meal and that he bought fresh veggies and

fruit for the first time in a very long time. He said he felt like he was in a better place financially. He still comes to our food shelf on occasion to get additional assistance.”

“My name is Joe. I receive \$45 in 3SquaresVT benefits a month. This allows me to buy the food I need for my special diet due to my heart disease.”

“I am trying to get over the guilt of accepting the help we are getting. We have very strong work ethics and it's frustrating when it's still a challenge to feed our family. With 3SquaresVT help, we have been shopping twice and, now, feel like our children are getting the fruits and vegetables they need to be healthy and happy. We are organic vegetable growers ourselves and know the importance of eating healthy. I am coming to terms with the guilt by knowing that all summer we give away hundreds of pounds of vegetables and fresh eggs to our community. It is important to us to see others eating well too. Please know that with the assistance that we are receiving, we will be buying wholesome food and shopping at locally owned stores to keep these funds in the local economy.”

“I work at Community Action and recently worked with a pregnant, single mom who also has a four-year-old child. She is going through a separation from her husband who has just returned from Afghanistan and is suffering from PTSD. She has never accessed services prior to this life change, and through a collaboration with NEKCA and DCF, she has been able to access 3SquaresVT and other benefit programs. She has a lot of stress in her life with a small child to care for, another one on the way, very little money, and a pending divorce. The 3SquaresVT benefit allows her to put food on the table for herself and her child, as well as help her nourish a healthy pregnancy.”

“I have a client in her late 50's on SSDI, living alone because her spouse has died. She has mobility issues, has no car, and lives in rural Vermont. Her income is around \$1,050 a month. She has a cell phone because she could not afford the cost of a land line; the installation alone was prohibitive. She has wood heat, and because fuel assistance is so limited, purchasing the wood she needs to heat her mobile home is very difficult. She cannot afford food and has borrowed money from family and friends to buy food, money she cannot pay back. She is thin and gaunt, has swollen lymph nodes, and is nutritionally disadvantaged. A recent blood test showed her lack of almost any Vitamin D in her system as well as low amounts of other valuable nutrients, vitamins and minerals.

I helped her apply for 3SquaresVT and she is eligible for the maximum \$200 benefit. This will afford her a basic balanced diet (being frugal is her middle name). To supplement her diet, she visits the local church, and they have brought her food, but the amount and variety is very limited. She goes to a food shelf, but there is not much there either. She has a box garden on her porch for fresh foods, but Vermont is a northern state and we only have a short window to grow food. Should the Farm Bill cut SNAP and her benefit be reduced, her health will fail, as she is already at risk now from poor nutrition. This will definitely cost the system much more in medical costs than the \$200 food benefit she gets.”

“When my daughter was first born it quickly became apparent that I could not manage financially on my own. My previously acquired skills and schooling did not generate enough income to adequately provide for my daughter. After struggling to get by for a year a friend suggested that I apply for 3SquaresVT, what we called “food stamps.” I had to overcome emotional hurdles and pride to go to the “welfare office” and ask for help, but once it was done I understood how much this program could help us. I accepted that it would make the difference we needed while working on an independent future. The food stamps made sure I could feed my daughter good, fresh food. We may have been driving old junk cars with bald tires, but we always had fresh fruits and vegetables on the table. Now, after getting more education, I have a good job, have bought a house, and my daughter is about to graduate college with a bachelor's degree and move forward with her own life. The years on public assistance were tight years, but throughout those years 3SquaresVT provided a safety net to help us through. The program was there when we needed it, and we couldn't have managed without it.”