Mountain Projects

December, 2023

Dear Friends of Mountain Projects,

In my years of community service I've met countless individuals who were born into disadvantaged situations, seniors without the support of family, and many others who have fallen into hard times, often through no fault of their own. Inevitably, winter is the most trying season of the year.

Mountain Projects exists to help these people meet basic human needs. Our approach isn't to offer handouts, instead we help address root issues to help people stabilize their lives. The truth is, most low-wage workers and fixed-income seniors lack any financial buffer, and crises can spin out of control quickly. Most are already making hard choices between holiday gifts, healthcare, fuel costs and food. If a catastrophe happens and we can reach them soon enough, we're often able to help them over the hump and down the road.



Patsy Davis

This holiday season we'll share some examples with you – some positive notes to show the serious impact that your generous donations have on the lives of the people we help. We've seen some amazing recoveries and beautiful success stories, tales of transformation that underscore the strength of the human spirit.

With your support, Mountain Projects works to build resilience in clients who face such hard times. Our community cannot afford not to address these issues, and when we work together, we help people help themselves and our community becomes a more prosperous place. These investments are our legacy and a promise to the future of western North Carolina.

We know there are many organizations that ask for your support this time each year. My prayer is that you will "give local". When we prioritize our community, we tackle issues that help to make life in Haywood and Jackson Counties better for all of us. You can be confident that your contributions will be carefully used. Together, our strategy will make a world of difference.

Blessings to you and yours,

Patsy A. Davis

Executive Director
pdavis@mountainprojects.org

Your generosity supports critical needs in our community, just when our friends and neighbors need it most

Some highlights of our year

Mountain Projects at Work

1. **Senior Nutrition Sites**
   Our Food Services program served over 100,000 meals at 51 sites, including meals for our senior nutrition program

2. **Head Start**
   Enrollment at our centers in Canton, Clyde, Waynesville, Sylva and Cullowhee increased by 9% in 2023





The Transformative Journey of Lorelei Garnes, Haywood County Digital Entrepreneur



Dean and Lorelei Garnes and Lorelei's children Matt (left) and Krisna (right)

More than three decades ago, Lorelei Garnes sought assistance from Mountain Projects which changed the trajectory of her life. After graduating high school with a four-month-old infant, Lorelei had very few choices – no job prospects and without money to pay their rent.

In that time of desperation, retired Jackson County school teacher Katherine Miller knocked on Lorelei's door to extend a helping hand. Katherine was Lorelei's landlord and she encouraged her tenant to pursue a college education. Miller drove the mother and then two babies a few miles down the road to Southwestern Community College, and helped sort through a complex pile of financial aid forms. As a result, Lorelei found her new path and decided to pursue a degree.

Financial aid was the first challenge. The second was how to manage the costs of rent and childcare. Lorelei found Mountain Projects. At that time, the agency was able to pay Lorelei's overdue rent, provided affordable childcare with Head Start, and helped with transportation and other resources to keep her family safe, healthy and warm.

Lorelei didn't miss a class and became known for bringing her children to college when pre-school and class schedules didn't match up. Lorelei learned all she could between feeding and diapering and became known for her grit and determination to succeed. "I felt like the community invested in me and I've done everything in my power to honor that investment."

She earned top honors and graduated with two undergraduate degrees and a Masters in Digital Marketing.

"Most people need a little assistance in challenging times and the support can make a positive impact for generations."

Fast forward to 2023, Lorelei owns the most successful digital media business in Haywood County, Digital Buzz Media. She has an all-star client list, and has become a trusted resource for website development and marketing for hundreds of clients.

But she shares plenty of credit with those who have helped her along her path, including Miller, Swain County teacher, Anne Watkins (who helped her through high school), and many others.

Today, Lorelei and her family are dedicated to "paying it forward," helping others through business mentorship and nonprofit donations. Lorelei and her husband, Dean, were active in Clyde flood recovery and are active members of the Haywood Chamber of Commerce.

"Most people need a little assistance in challenging times and that the support can make a positive impact for generations. Your organization has played a pivotal role in shaping my path and without the support, we would be telling a very different story, " says Lorelei.

Lorelei's story is about resilience, tenacity and hard work. Mountain Projects is incredibly proud of her achievements and we feel grateful that this successful entrepreneur and advocate for women and children is willing for us to share.

YOUR CONTRIBUTIONS AT WORK: *Mountain Projects finds innovative ways to help people help themselves*

Mountain Projects raises emergency funds to help in situations like the Millsaps, guiding families and individuals to long-term solutions. If you would like to help the Millsaps and other families experiencing difficult circumstances and serious emergencies, please contribute to the emergency fund.





3 **Senior Resource Center**
Elder Abuse Awareness Walk 2023

4 **GetCoveredWNC**
Help for displaced millworkers to keep health insurance and access state funds

5 **Smoky Mountain Housing Partnership**
Front door keys for a brand new homeowner!

6 **Weatherization & Rehab**
Supporting Hands on Jackson

7 **Haywood Transit**
362,316 miles covered in last fiscal year







Donna and Ronnie Millsaps and five of their grandchildren

"Our Grandchildren are our World" Millsaps Work to Support Family

Ronnie and Donna Millsaps, of Jackson County, have encountered struggles that are incomprehensible for some but all too familiar for many in our community.

After each of her adult children developed substance misuse issues, Donna, 58, and her second husband Ronnie took full custody of six grandchildren, ranging in age from 4 to 13.

"Our family always went to Church and our kids were well cared for in our home," Millsaps recalls. "I don't know what we could've done differently to make things better. But now we're concentrating on our grandchildren, and we're doing everything we can. We didn't expect our lives to be like this."

"Someone said to me 'you can't save the world, honey,' but we are focused on improving the lives of these grandchildren."

2023 was difficult for the Millsaps, but they are thankful to be together. "The children call us Mama and Daddy," Donna says.

Donna is disabled and stays home while Ronnie works for the Swain Co. Transit system, but his recent cancer diagnosis has further clouded their picture. They're behind on mortgage payments and "every bill has become a negotiation," she says.

Fortunately, their bank is being supportive, and the family has reached out to Mountain Projects for help. Mountain Projects has helped with physical needs, including bunk beds for all six kids (which brought tears), shoes, and tires for the family car which were "down to the wires". The Healthy Opportunities Pilot program, administered by Mountain Projects, will provide food boxes and other services for the children.

"We are so appreciative," says Donna. "We've never needed help and we've never asked for help, we tend to keep to ourselves. We just ran out of options. Someone said to me, 'you can't save the world, honey,' but we are focused on improving the lives of these grandchildren. They are our family and we are doing our best to provide them with what they need to grow up strong."

Our Service by the Numbers

700+ funded emergency requests
5,500 hours of client intake
4,079 attended Senior programs
36,250 trips on Haywood Transit
178 children in Head Start & Early Head Start
136 Head Start kids received dental care
1,598 Affordable Care Act enrollments
8,986 healthcare counseling appointments
628 laid-off millworkers received subsidies
100,000+ food service meals served
375 loads of firewood delivered to seniors
136 households served by HOP program
145 home rehab and weatherization jobs
266,450 people reached by Mountain Strong
27 Foster Grandparents shared 17,371 hours
49 Senior Companions served 157 Clients
168 clients in home-buying programs
8 affordable homes completed
800+ families served in Section 8
$4.4 million in rental payments to landlords
15 families in Family Self Sufficiency program
56 in Workforce Opportunity programs
34 WIOA participants receiving tuition help
546 SHIIP senior clients served
$245,799 prescription dollars saved
68 clients served by in-home aides







Please consider a contribution. Your support strengthens our community!

TO DONATE ELECTRONICALLY:
- Visit our website, MountainProjects.org/donate
- Fill out the online contribution form

TO DONATE BY MAIL:
- Fill out the enclosed contribution coupon
- Place coupon with credit card info OR check in return envelope
- Add a first class stamp (thank you!) and drop in mail

WANT TO VOLUNTEER?
- Call John Chicoine, Volunteer Coordinator: 828-356-2833

DONATE "ALMOST NEW" HOUSEHOLD ITEMS:
- Mountain Projects Resale Store, 2143 Asheville Rd in Waynesville
- Sylva Linings Resale Store, 1264 W Main St in Sylva

Mountain Projects is a 501(c)3 nonprofit charitable organization.
Donations to Mountain Projects are tax deductible. Our EIN number is 56-0849092.

Blanket DRIVE

Our 2023 Haywood County Blanket Drive, led by the Waynesville Rotary Club with help from other service clubs, banking institutions and credit unions, lasts throughout November. In 2023, our goal is 300 blankets, and we'll also collect toddler-size coats for Head Start children.

NEW blankets and coats can be mailed, ordered-to-be-delivered or dropped off at our office in Waynesville.

Thank You!





8 Healthy Opportunities Pilot
The new HOP program served 136 familes already enrolled in Managed Medicaid with non-medical interventions to improve health outcomes. Food, transportation, housing and safety play a part.

9 Mountain Strong
Mountain Strong WNC's mission is to increase resilience in youth, families, and communities through efforts focused on reducing substance misuse. In 2022-2023, Prevention Services reached 266,450 people.

Contact Us

Waynesville

2177 Asheville Rd.
Waynesville NC 28786
Phone: (828) 452-1447

Sylva

154-B Medical Park Loop
Sylva, NC 28779
Phone: (828) 586-2345

Wish to inquire about our services for you or someone you know? Schedule a meeting with one of our intake counselors, at either our Haywood County or Jackson County offices.

Call for an appointment:

Haywood County	828-492-4103 or 828-492-4114
Jackson County	828-586-2345 or 828-550-5315

Website: mountainprojects.org