MOUNTAIN PROJECTS



Waynesville Congregate Nutrition Center Manager Annette Washabaugh, standing, with clients Patsy Parton and Rita Phillips. Our centers provide hot lunches and social time for seniors in Maggie Valley and Waynesville.

Newsletter, November 2025

Politics Aside, Neighbors Helping Neighbors

Dear Friends,



Si Simmons

I'm writing to you as the new Director of Mountain Projects, and let me tell you—**what a privilege** it is to be part of this work. Around here, we've always believed in **looking out for one another,** and I see that spirit alive every day in our staff, our neighbors, and in friends like you.

We **appreciate you** being on our mailing list and thank you for reading our fall updates. This information will help you understand what's happening with our programs and services. **No matter what happens** in these uncertain times, I am proud to lead our staff and I'm proud of all we do to help **make our community stronger.**

The lives of low-income households have grown more difficult lately. **Paychecks don't stretch** far enough. Rent and **groceries cost more** than they ever have and many more people need transportation support. That's why Mountain Projects is **here—to step in** with food, housing repairs, a ride to the doctor, help with home heating bills and oftentimes, emergency assistance when a family has run out of options. Our motto is **"helping people help themselves",** and that extends to about **15,000 client cases** each year.

Sure, there are **ups and downs** with funding and politics, but one thing hasn't changed in 60 years: **neighbors helping neighbors**. That's what we're built on, and it's what keeps us going. And honestly, we **couldn't do it without you.** When you give, when you volunteer, when you share our stories—you're part of the solution. **You're the reason we can keep showing up.**

So thank you. **Thank you for caring** about this place we all call home. Thank you for standing with us. And thank you **for believing** that when we come together, **there's no challenge too big** for our mountain community.

In gratitude, Si Simmons

Executive Director
ssimmons@mountainprojects.org

Shop, Donate, and Support Your Neighbors

Mountain Projects' Resale Stores in Waynesville and Sylva accept gently used furniture, clothing, and household items. Sales support programs helping seniors, families, and neighbors in need across Haywood and Jackson Counties. Donate your quality items—together we turn everyday things into real help for local people.

Meet our youngest volunteer, grandson of a volunteer in our Waynesville Resale store!



A Note About Funding – Your Donations Come at a Critical Time

Funding scenarios in Washington because of the new budget and the government shutdown, along with corresponding actions on the state level, are serious threats to many of our programs.

As you read through this newsletter, please note dots associated with certain segments. A yellow dot means the programs mentioned are threatened, red means defunded or cut, and when you see a green dot, the program is funded for now.

- **Defunded or cut**
- **Threatened**
- **Funded for Now**

Your contributions create stability for families in Haywood & Jackson Counties

With Food Resources Strained, Mountain Projects Organizes Donors



Thousands of people in WNC have had SNAP (food stamps) benefits delayed in November, and many of them are our families, friends and neighbors.

That's why we opened food pantries at our Waynesville and Sylva offices to help fill the gap. Mountain Projects opened its offices in Waynesville and Sylva for shelf-stable food donations and financial contributions to provide milk, cheese, juice, fruits, vegetables, and other proteins to those in need.

Response has been brisk, and we have been able to bolster the efforts of our friends at food pantries in Haywood and Jackson Counties.

While food relief is not our main mission, we also offer year-round nutritional and social support for seniors through our congregate nutrition centers in Maggie Valley and Waynesville.

Biltmore Chuch - Waynesville Campus Pastor Curt McClure recently delivered a generous donation of food and heaters that were used to help those affected by the SNAP shutdown. Curt is pictured with Mountain Projects staffers, from left, Christy Mosteller, Dianne Gray, Haley Griffith, and Mary Jane Messer.

Funding Returns for Foster Grandparents Program

After two months of uncertainty, Mountain Projects recently received its grant award to reinstate its Foster Grandparents program after it had been halted. Funding from AmeriCorps Seniors, which oversees the program, was impounded by the White House Office of Management and Budget despite an approved renewal application for a three-year grant.

On September 5, Michelle Claytor, Director of the Haywood Senior Resource Center, received word that the $287,000, three year grant had been released. The grant covers stipends, mileage, training, and administrative costs for its 22 Foster Grandparents. We've operated the Foster Granparents program in Haywood County since 1989.



Foster Grandparent volunteers Charlotte Spain and Pam Cairnes

Section 8 Housing: Small Team With High Impact

The Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher program helps very low-income families, older adults, people with disabilities, and people emerging from homelessness afford safe, decent housing in the private market.

Who Depends on Housing Vouchers?



70.4% Without Dependents

29.6% 1 or More Dependents

Through Mountain Projects, eligible households find their own apartments or homes, pay about 30% of their income toward rent and utilities. A federal subsidy pays the the landlord the balance. There are 850 vouchers in use in our two-county service area, putting a roof over the heads of up to 1,685 local people. Based on current fair market rents, that represents an estimated $7.8 million each year in federal rent payments flowing straight to local homeowners and property owners—supporting both housing stability and the local economy.

As federal housing dollars face growing pressure and rising rents stretch limited funds, Section 8 is at risk of serving fewer families even as the need grows. For households living on the edge, it is often the difference between staying housed in their community or facing overcrowding, unsafe conditions, or homelessness.



Section 8 staff, from left to right: Nicole Parton, Oscar Vasquez, Amanda Singletary, Anne Velez, Paula Robinson and Chad Hall

Who We Serve

Mountain Projects' 145 employees serve more than 15,000 people each year across Haywood and Jackson Counties. The people we see most often are older adults, people living with disabilities, and low-income working families who are doing their best to stay housed, fed, and healthy.

Housing data gives a clear picture of the households who depend on our support:



1/3 headed by a senior



40% headed by a person with a disability



1 in 5 led by a working adult trying to keep their family stable on a limited income

Behind every number is a neighbor who wants what we all want: a safe home, enough to eat, and a fair chance to move forward.

An Impactful 2025

$365,802.82 in emergency fund and winter warmth donations distributed to support local families in crisis

$359,086.71 in Resale Store sales, turning thrift into support for low-income families



195 children served through Head Start

619 people enrolled in coverage through GetCoveredWNC and **3,175** advised of affordable healthcare options, with a total impact of **$6.4 million** in health coverage and tax credits

180 households received weatherization and housing rehabilitation services

850 households, including **642** seniors and about **325** children, housed through HUD/Section 8, with **$7.8 million** in rental payments to **270** local landlords

2,147 direct participants served through Mountain Strong Prevention Services

57,513 volunteer hours contributed by Foster Grandparents and Senior Companions

21,600 meals provided through congregate nutrition and food services

42,000 public transit trips provided—a **13%** increase

See the Impact: Mountain Projects Annual Report

Want to see how your support is changing lives in Haywood and Jackson Counties? Visit our website to read the Mountain Projects Annual Report, which highlights the programs, partnerships, and financial stewardship that make our work possible. You'll find stories of neighbors helped with housing, transportation, food, early childhood education, senior services, and more, along with a clear picture of how every dollar is put to work.

Read the latest report at: mountainprojects.org/about-us/annual-reports



Many families in Haywood and Jackson counties are feeling the strain of rising costs and Mountain Projects is working to make sure no one goes hungry. We're collecting food and household essentials to support our neighbors, and your donation can make a real impact.

Donation Drop-Off:
Mountain Projects offices at 2177 Asheville Road, Waynesville or 154-B Medical Park Loop, Sylva

Get Covered WNC – Make your Appointments during Open Enrollment



It's important not to auto-renew Marketplace insurance, due to repeal of healthcare subsidies. Rates are set to double!

Affordable Care Act (ACA) coverage is a lifesaver for North Carolinians who need healthcare at an affordable rate. Through the federal Marketplace and the state's Medicaid expansion, people who once went without coverage can now see doctors, fill prescriptions, and get preventive care with costs scaled to their income. Nearly one million North Carolinians are enrolled in ACA Marketplace plans, and about 650,000 have gained coverage through Medicaid expansion.

Open Enrollment for 2026 coverage runs November 1, 2025–January 15, 2026; enroll by December 15 for coverage starting January 1. For small business owners, low-wage workers, people between jobs, and rural families, this affordable coverage means managing chronic conditions, avoiding medical debt, and staying healthy enough to work and care for loved ones.

Get Covered WNC Navigators, left to right: Sarah Clark, Jane Harrison, Susan Rose, Jan Plummer and Christy Mosteller. Mosteller also manages our Healthy Opportunities Pilot program.

Affordable Housing Notes





Top left: Former Executive Director Patsy Davis receives 2025 Rural Housing Service Award from the Housing Assistance Council (HAC) at the Build Rural 2025 Conference in Washington, D.C.. Top right: Smoky Mountain Housing Partnership Program Manager Maggie Leftwich presents at the same conference. Her session, "Streamlining Housing Through Modular Innovation," highlighted how communities like ours are rethinking affordable homebuilding.



Rehab & Weatherization Program Manager Vivian Bumgarner with service recipient Margaret Biddix during the annual Day of Caring volunteer event in Sylva.

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

To qualify for our services, schedule a conversation with one of our intake counselors in Haywood or Jackson County.

Call for an appointment:

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

Help Keep Our Neighbors Warm This Winter

Mountain Projects' Winter Warmth Campaign is how our community steps in where other programs stop. Your gift provides emergency heating assistance—oil, propane, wood, electric bills, and small but critical fixes—to keep people safe in their homes. We prioritize older adults on fixed incomes, families with young children, people with disabilities, and neighbors living on the edge.

Please consider a gift to the Winter Warmth Campaign so "heat" isn't the bill people have to skip this winter. Also this winter, Mountain Projects is collecting **new space heaters** and **new blankets** to help neighbors stay safe and warm at home.

Many families in Haywood and Jackson Counties are facing cold nights with no safe way to heat their homes.

Your donation can make an immediate difference for an older adult on a fixed income, a family with young children, or someone recovering from a crisis.

We're collecting:

- New electric space heaters (with safety shut-off)
- New blankets and comforters
- New throws for seniors and homebound neighbors

Donations support our Winter Warmth and emergency assistance programs, getting warmth directly to people who need it most. To donate, drop items at one of our offices during regular business hours. Together, we can turn extra blankets and heaters into comfort and safety this winter.

Keeping the Heat On: Why LIHEAP Matters

The Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) is a federal block grant that helps low-income households pay energy bills, prevent shutoffs, and stay safe during extreme heat and cold.

For fiscal year 2025, roughly $4.1 billion has been released to states, tribes, and territories to run heating, cooling, and emergency crisis assistance. At the same time, budget uncertainty and administrative disruptions have led some areas to delay or temporarily pause parts of their programs, even as energy prices and arrears remain high. As winter approaches, demand for LIHEAP continues to outstrip available funding across the United States.

LIHEAP is operated through our Rehabilitation and Weatherization Program. Your gifts to Winter Warmth are welcome!

Your support strengthens our community!

Your gift – whatever the amount – will go straight to work, providing tangible, life-changing support to those who need it most.

TO DONATE ELECTRONICALLY:
- Visit our website, MountainProjects.org/giving & fill out the contribution form

TO DONATE BY MAIL:
- Fill out the enclosed contribution coupon
- Place coupon with credit card info OR check in return envelope, 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., Waynesville
- Sylva Linings Resale Store, 1264 W. Main St., Sylva

We're grateful for your contributions!

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