

ANNUAL REPORT 2023 - 2024



United Way of Coastal
and Western Connecticut



TRANSFORMING OUR COMMUNITY

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FROM OUR CEO & BOARD CHAIR

To Our Community,

As we reflect on this past year, we are proud to mark a significant milestone – our first full year as United Way of Coastal and Western Connecticut (UWCWC). This year has been one of true transformation: a year where we strengthened our foundation, deepened our partnerships, and sharpened our focus on creating systems change.

Together with our partners and supporters, we have taken bold steps to address the challenges facing families in our region. We expanded access to quality child care, improved access to healthy food and critical health resources, and stabilized families through rapid, flexible financial assistance. Recognizing that real change requires more than direct service, we also advanced policy solutions, built out collective action initiatives, and invested in strong, community-driven partnerships across sectors.

We spent much of the year developing our 2024–2027 Strategic Plan, guided by community voices and cross-sector collaboration. Approved by our Board of Directors in June 2024, this plan serves as our roadmap for the years ahead – sharpening our commitment to equity, innovation, and impact, and ensuring we remain responsive to the needs of the 27 towns we serve.

This year, because of your support, we:

- Increased child care access by strengthening family child care networks and workforce development.
- Helped individuals and families facing food insecurity through direct assistance and innovative programs like the Food Farmacy.
- Provided critical financial relief to households one unexpected expense away from crisis.
- Advocated for public policies that create more equitable pathways to stability and opportunity.
- Launched and expanded collective impact initiatives, bringing nonprofits, businesses, schools, health care systems, and government together to drive long-term solutions.
- Invested millions of dollars into the community through grants, supporting local nonprofits at the forefront of change.
- Strengthened cross-sector partnerships, recognizing that meaningful, lasting change is only possible when we work together.

This work is complex – and it is essential. By investing in families today and building systems for tomorrow, we are creating a future where every person in our community has the opportunity to thrive.

Thank you for being part of this journey. Together, we are leading the way toward a stronger, healthier, and more equitable future for all.

With gratitude,



A handwritten signature in black ink.

Isabel Almeida
President & CEO



A handwritten signature in black ink.

Cheryl Bakewell
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Board Chair

OUR IMPACT

At UWCWC, we believe that **health, education, food security, and financial stability** are the foundations of a strong and thriving community. That's why our work is focused on addressing urgent needs today while investing in long-term solutions for tomorrow.

Our programs are designed to support **ALICE (Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed)** households—working families who are often one crisis away from financial hardship. Whether we're increasing access to quality child care, connecting families to healthy food, or providing emergency financial assistance, our goal is to remove barriers and help every household move toward lasting stability and opportunity.

Expanding Access to Quality Child Care

Every child deserves a strong start, and **Cora's Kids** is making that a reality by **increasing access to high-quality, affordable child care**. This initiative supports family child care providers—many of whom are minority women and first-generation entrepreneurs—in obtaining licensing, business training, and professional development. In doing so, Cora's Kids not only strengthens the child care workforce but also provides working families with safe, reliable care options.

In 2023-24:

- Added over **700 licensed child care slots** since 2018.
- Supported **116 child care providers** with licensing, business training, and professional development.
- Served more than **1,000 children**.
- Trained **150+ community messengers** to promote early childhood development and share resources with the community.
- Launched **Seedlings to Sprouts**, a program that teaches nutrition education and expands access to locally grown food for children and providers.



Improving Access to Food

Access to nutritious, affordable food is essential to both health and economic stability. Yet for many ALICE households, the rising cost of living means food is often one of the first necessities cut from the budget. United Way is committed to ensuring that families don't have to choose between paying bills and putting healthy meals on the table.

Through a combination of direct financial assistance, partnerships, and innovative food access programs, we are helping individuals and families meet their basic nutritional needs while improving long-term health outcomes.

Food Farmacy of Greater Danbury

In November 2023, we proudly opened the Food Farmacy of Greater Danbury — a first-of-its-kind "food is medicine" initiative launched in partnership with Nuvance Health, the Connecticut Institute for Communities (CIFIC), and Community Action Agency of Western Connecticut/Community Food Rescue.

The Food Farmacy provides more than just groceries — it combines access to healthy food, nutrition education, and support services to individuals managing chronic health conditions like hypertension. Patients are referred by their healthcare providers and receive free, healthy food alongside personalized guidance to improve their well-being. The goal is simple yet powerful: to treat food as a critical part of health care — addressing food insecurity while helping individuals live healthier, more stable lives.

In 2023-24:

- Served **122 families** with personalized care and support.
- Completed **467** consultations with registered dietitians.
- Provided **2,356 food visits** to increase access to healthy, nutritious food.



I have hypertension and am diabetic, and with the help of the Farmacy and being able to get fresh fruits and vegetables on a weekly basis, it has brought down my A1C level. I'm now in control of my diabetes. My doctor has been at me for months to get it under control, and she's very happy that I finally have.

- Food Farmacy Client



Stabilizing Families Through Financial Assistance

Direct Financial Assistance for Basic Needs

United Way provides rapid, flexible cash assistance to help low-to-moderate-income households—especially ALICE families—manage unexpected crises. When traditional resources fall short, this direct support helps cover urgent expenses like food, housing, utilities, or child care. Many ALICE families earn too much to qualify for government aid but still live one emergency away from instability. By offering immediate relief, we ensure families can make essential choices with dignity and autonomy.

In 2023-24:

- Provided more than **\$423,000** in financial assistance.
- Supported more than **1,159** individuals.
- Helped cover **essential expenses** including food, housing, youth enrichment, and utility bills.

COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

Food Collaboratives

United Way supports the Danbury Food Collaborative (DFC) and Stamford Food Collaborative (SFC)—community-led coalitions working to improve access to fresh, affordable, and culturally appropriate food. Made up of nonprofits, public agencies, funders, and other partners, these collaboratives address immediate food needs while advancing long-term solutions. Both played key roles in statewide advocacy, including the School Meals for All CT Campaign and the Connecticut Commission on Women, Children, Seniors, Equity, and Opportunity's Food Insecurity in Connecticut report, helping shape food policy and elevate local voices.

Danbury Food Collaborative

- **10 collaborative meetings** engaged more than **30 partners**, including nonprofits, educational institutions, public agencies, funders, individuals, and faith-based organizations.
- **Data Modernization Project** (funded by the CT DoAg Food System Capacity Building Grant) piloted efforts to map services, reduce duplication, and build infrastructure for data-driven decision-making.
- **Thanksgiving Feeding Gratitude Project** served nearly **12,000 individuals** with over **\$22,000** in fresh, culturally appropriate holiday food, distributed collaboratively by DFC members.

Stamford Food Collaborative

- **10 collaborative meetings** engaged more than **40 partners**, including nonprofits, educational institutions, public agencies, funders, individuals, and faith-based organizations.
- **Food Insecurity Lunch and Learn** hosted in partnership with the Interfaith Council of Southwestern Connecticut to promote cross-sector collaboration and expand SFC's reach.
- **Marketing Strategy Plan** (funded by the CT DoAg Food System Capacity Building Grant) developed as a blueprint to improve awareness and usage of member services, informed by feedback from over **200 community members**.



Agewell Community Council

United Way serves as the backbone organization for the AgeWell Community Council, a collaborative group of agencies and organizations working to promote healthy aging and improve the well-being of older adults in Danbury.

In 2023–2024, the Council:

- **Hosted expert speakers** to explore the impact of social isolation and its serious health consequences for older adults.
- **Conducted a community survey** that revealed a significant percentage of Danbury's older adults are experiencing social isolation.
- **Delivered fraud prevention presentations** to help seniors identify and avoid scams.
- **Held an educational session on Artificial Intelligence**, offering members insights into how emerging technologies may affect aging services.

Community Engagement

- **Community Leader Coffees:** Held **15 gatherings** that brought together more than 100 nonprofit leaders to discuss local challenges, opportunities, and collaborative solutions.
- **Community Survey:** Engaged **over 200 nonprofits**, community members, and stakeholders to gather insights on pressing needs and inform future priorities.



Volunteerism

Volunteers are the backbone of our mission, fueling community change with their time, energy, and compassion. This year, **1,327 individuals** rolled up their sleeves to support their neighbors across a wide range of hands-on projects—from packing weekend snacks for children and assembling hygiene kits, to organizing food drives and preparing holiday care packages.

Signature events like Day of Action mobilized **250 volunteers** in a single day across **15 community projects**, while seasonal efforts ensured that families had what they needed during the holidays. Through these collective efforts, our volunteers contributed an estimated **\$88,716 in donated time** and talent—making a powerful difference across our region.

GRANTMAKING AND CAPACITY BUILDING

As part of our commitment to strengthening community infrastructure and advancing equity, UWCWC provides funding and capacity building to local nonprofits and serves as a trusted fiduciary for public and private grants. From basic needs to workforce development, our grantmaking strategy is rooted in data, equity, and community voice—ensuring resources reach the organizations closest to the challenges and most equipped to create meaningful change.

Impact Philanthropy Grants

United Way awarded **\$457,500** to **51** nonprofit agencies working in the areas of health, education, and financial stability. These agencies provided direct support to over **32,000 individuals**, including **15,646 children**.

Social Equity Council Community Re-Investment Grants

As fiduciary for the State of Connecticut's Social Equity Council, United Way administered **\$1.8 million** to support reentry and youth programs in Bridgeport and Stamford. These investments helped create **189 jobs** and delivered vital services to **23,982 individuals**, advancing equity in two of Connecticut's most diverse communities.

City of Danbury Social Service Grants

Serving as the designated grant administrator for the City of Danbury, United Way distributed **\$204,000** to **16 local agencies**, supporting initiatives in housing, mental health, and food insecurity. In 2023–2024, these investments served **16,880 Danbury residents**.

Emergency Food and Shelter Program (EFSP)

United Way managed **Phase 40 EFSP funding** for multiple jurisdictions, ensuring critical emergency assistance was delivered to those in crisis.

The total funding distributed was: \$436,043

- Bridgeport: \$200,580
- Danbury: \$61,046
- Norwalk: \$74,127
- Stamford: \$100,290



Jasmin, a 22-year-old from Greater Norwalk, came to BNT with a dream of owning a home but didn't know where to start. Through BNT's first-time homeownership class and one-on-one support, she gained the knowledge, confidence, and tools to buy her first home—and become a landlord. Her success shows the power of BNT's mission to build financial stability and self-sufficiency through education.

-Jasmine, United Way Grant Recipient



Soup to Nuts: Building Nonprofit Capacity

In its second year, Soup to Nuts continued to strengthen the nonprofit sector through a monthly capacity-building series presented in partnership with Fairfield County's Community Foundation Center for Nonprofit Excellence. This series connects nonprofits with subject matter experts in key areas such as marketing, fundraising, data collection, storytelling, financial management, advocacy, and more.

- **200+ nonprofit professionals** participated in the series, gaining practical tools and insights to enhance their organizations' impact and sustainability.

PUBLIC POLICY & ADVOCACY

Our commitment to community well-being goes beyond direct service. We advocate for policies that address the root causes of financial hardship and drive lasting, systemic change. By partnering with policymakers, nonprofit organizations, and community leaders, we work to ensure that every household—especially those living at or below the ALICE threshold—has access to the resources and opportunities needed to thrive.

In 2023-24:

Our advocacy focused on critical issues impacting ALICE families, including:

- **Expanding Access to Early Care and Education**, ensuring all children have quality learning opportunities from the start.
- **Strengthening Financial Stability**, including support for an expanded **Child Tax Credit** that puts money back into the hands of working households.
- **Ensuring No-Cost School Meals** so every child can learn and grow without hunger.
- **Enhancing 211 Services**, connecting individuals in crisis with housing, food, and mental health support.

In addition to championing these priorities, UWCWC submitted written and in-person testimony on a variety of policy proposals—ranging from child care expansion and incubator models, to housing affordability, universal kindergarten phase-in, and the creation of the Blue Ribbon Panel on Child Care.

We also participated in the annual **Morning Without Child Care** rally to raise awareness around much-needed investments in early care and education and hosted a **Virtual Legislative Breakfast**, bringing together lawmakers and community stakeholders to discuss these pressing issues and elevate community voices.

Through this work, UWCWC remains committed to breaking down barriers and driving public policy solutions that promote equity, opportunity, and long-term financial security for all.



COLLECTIVE IMPACT

UWCWC proudly serves as the backbone for three Cradle to Career (C2C) collective impact initiatives—**Bridgeport Prospers**, **Stamford Cradle to Career (SC2C)**, and the **Danbury Collective**—and works in close collaboration with two additional StriveTogether communities: Norwalk ACTS and Bridge to Success in Waterbury.

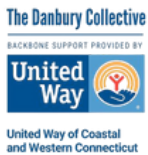
Each Cradle to Career initiative brings together school districts, nonprofits, families, local government, businesses, and community leaders to align around shared goals, address systemic inequities, and improve outcomes in education, health, and economic mobility.

Through these three initiatives, we help to strengthen the systems that support **125,000 children across Bridgeport, Danbury, and Stamford.**



Bridgeport Prospers

Bridgeport Prospers is a collective impact initiative focused on early childhood, career pathways, and community resilience. It works to ensure children are developmentally ready by age three, that young people are prepared for post-secondary success, and that the community is equipped to support social-emotional health.



Danbury Collective

Launched in 2024, the Danbury Collective is a cross-sector initiative focused on chronic absenteeism, early childhood education, and youth mental health. It engages diverse stakeholders to co-create strategies that improve life outcomes for children and families.



Stamford Cradle to Career (SC2C)

SC2C is a citywide collective impact initiative committed to eliminating disparities and ensuring all Stamford children and youth succeed academically, socially, and emotionally. Working across five key areas—early childhood success, academic achievement, college and career readiness, youth mental health, and family and community engagement—SC2C brings together schools, nonprofits, government, businesses, and families to create lasting change.



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Ashley will handle this list

Thank you to all our corporate partners who support United Way through a workplace campaign, special event, or a corporate gift. We're grateful for your commitment to our work.

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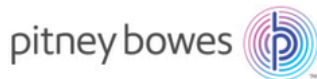
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Lucy Teixeira
Karen Tracey
Katherine Webster-O'Keefe
Dajuan Wiggins
Kasey Yakavonis

HEART OF GOLD SCHOLARSHIP COMMITTEE

Madhavi Desai
Luis Diez
Jerred Jones
Douglas Lausten
Danette Melchionne
Angie Murphy
Aru Nandikesan

DAY OF ACTION COMMITTEE

Steve Consiglio
Dina Francisco Pereira
Jodi Martino
Heidi Namin
Bonnie Pirro
William Valenti

LIVE UNITED GOLF COMMITTEE

Dave Arconti
Christina Bodine Aysseh
Sandra Capellaro
Greg Manning
Ralph McIntosh
Mark Ouellette
Dave Pergola

SAVE OFFICE VOLUNTEER

Eleanor Gianfortune

BACK TO SCHOOL

Rich Daross
Susan Denino
David Elmore
Jeanne Faure
Jennifer Ginofi
Francis Gorglione
Bob Greco
Don Gregory
Tricia Gregory
Patty Gustello
Josephine Iorio
Kathy Morlock
Mark Panzera
Flora Quammie
Vision Engineering
Assemblers (5)

OPERATION THANKSGIVING

Rich Daross
Francis Gorglione
Bob Greco
Don Gregory
Mark Panzera
Flora Quammie
Al Tani
Brian Whittfield

WEEK OF THE YOUNG CHILD

Irena Antos
Adrienne Barr
Corinne Booth
Katie Byrnes
Luis Diez
Nyree' Frazier
Althea Green
Robert V Hendrick Jr.
Lyn Kobsa
Loretta D Lloyd-Reeves
Lizabeth Miskelly
Aimee Monroy Smith
Perri Mucci
Rosa Parravano
Maria Ramos
Julio Reinoso
Vincent Santilli
Milagrosa Seguinot
Tashi iyana Shuler-Drakes
Steve Viores
Liza Vitale

FOOD AS MEDICINE STEERING COMMITTEE

Dr. Brenda Ayers, MD
Rowena Bergman
Stacey Brusca
Karen Cassel
Billie-Jo Frazier
Denise Kentala
Indira Meza
Marlene Moranino
Amanda Neese
Maria Parham, RD
Heather Peracchio, RD
William Rausch
Michele Ruderman, RD
Mark Sanchez
Gloria Verdino

2023-2024 STEWARDS

Senior Leadership

Isabel Almeida
President and CEO

Arlene Ajami
Chief Financial Officer

Ashley Gaudiano
VP, Community Impact

Edith Presley
President, SC2C

Katerina Vlahos
Exec. Director,
Bridgeport Prospers

Melissa Hannequin
Exec. Director,
Danbury Collective

Gail Carroll
VP, Marketing &
Resource Development

Yolande Ford
Sr. Dir. of Diversity,
Equity & Inclusion

Lauren Scopaz - Daunais
VP, Strategy & Operations,
SC2C

Staff

Lisa Alexander
Program Budget Manager

Roel Eblamo
Senior Accountant

Karissa Muñiz
Marketing & Donor Engagement Mgr.

Melissa Stanley
SC2C Sr. Mgr., Civic Engmt.

Nicole Albohn
Events & Volunteer Mgr.

Katherine Francis
SLC Community Impact Coord.

Katherine Murphy
SC2C Dir. of Data Eval. & Learn

Melissa Stern
Grant Writer

Melanie Amador
SC2C Community
Engagement Liaison

Izabela Frankiewicz
Finance Director

Alicia Nowlin-Downey
Community Engagement Coord.

Tajvic Tazwar
Comms. Mgr., Collective
Impact

Anita Chandran
VP Products PDM LLC

Ingrid Gamboa
Toolkit Licensing Coord.

Douglas Ordonez
Senior Dir. of Comm. Impact

Gabriella Tozzi
SC2C Administrative Coord.

Talyn Cook
Sr. Mgr. of Community &
Civic Engagement

Jennifer Godzeno
Sr. Director Col. Action Strategy

Elaine Osowski
Resource Development Mgr.

Maria del Pilar Vargas
Sr. Director Child Care
Initiative

Tamika Cope
Parent Ambassador

Angelica Gorrio
SC2C Communications Mgr.

Tatsiana Petushok
Finance Associate

Cecilia Veiga
Executive Assistant Office
Mgr.

Zaida Coraizaca
Childcare Initiative Coord.

Samantha Hayes
Events Manager

Elizabeth Quiñonez
Sr. Dir. of Early Childhood

Rosario Velazquez
College & Career Readiness
Mgr.

Shawn Davis
Community School Mgr.
Rippowam Middle School

Tida Infahsaeng
Sr. Dir of Advocacy & Partnership

Gabriella Ramon
Benefits Specialist

Roversy Ventura
Human Resources
Generalist

Leticia De La Rosa
Community School Mgr
Dolan Middle School

Ebony Jeffress
Dir. Corporate Engagement

Lisbeth Rodriguez
Parent Ambassador

Brittney Vosters
Dir. of Donor Relations

Wendy Del Monte
Food Farmacy Operator

Jayson-Ann Johnson
Mgr. of Early Childhood
Initiatives

Victoria Scofield
Comm. Investments Sr. Coord.

Archeline Youte
Comm. Engagement Coord.

Suzanne Dolan
Executive Assistant

Lois Kugler
AgeWell Comm. Council Coord.

Jennifer Smith
Controller

Barry Sobolewski
Sr. Dir. of Information Systems

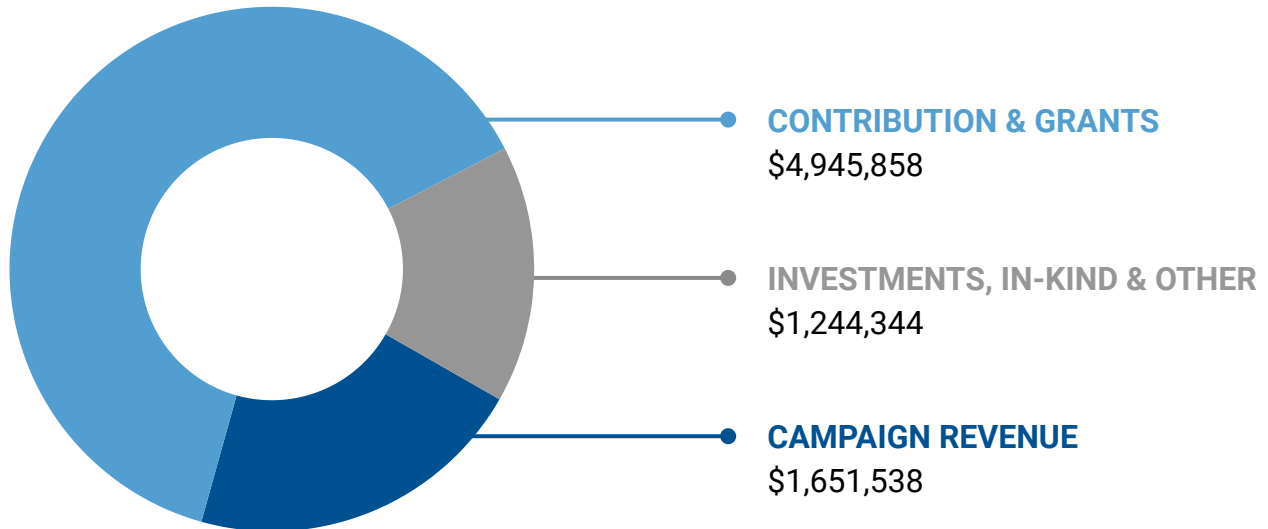
Faith Douglass
RD Director

Sarah Lehberger
Sr. Mgr., Comm. Resilience

FINANCIAL SUMMARY

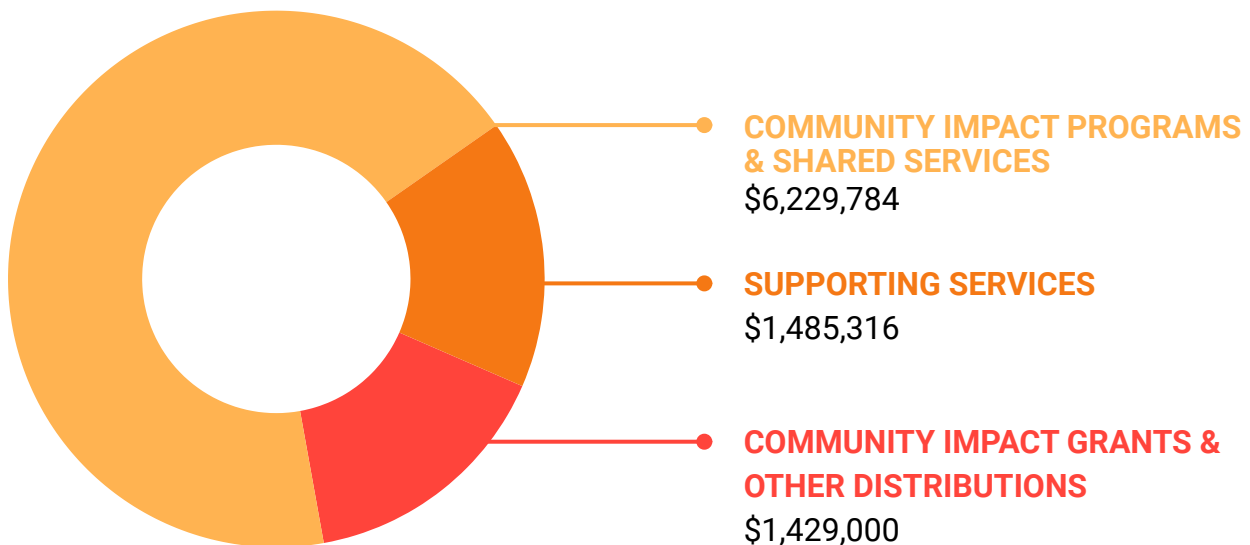
REVENUE

TOTAL \$7,841,740



EXPENSES

TOTAL \$9,144,100



As we move into the next fiscal year, **we remain steadfast in our commitment to addressing critical needs and creating opportunities for all.** With your continued partnership, we will build on this year's successes, ensuring every individual and family has access to the resources they need to thrive.



**United Way of Coastal
and Western Connecticut**

2023 - 2024 Annual Report

**NORTHERN FAIRFIELD
COUNTY**

301 Main St. Suite 2-5
Danbury, CT 06810
(203) 792-5330

**SOUTHERN LITCHFIELD
COUNTY**

24 Bank St.
New Milford, CT 06776
(860) 354-8800

STAMFORD

1150 Summer St. 2nd FL
Stamford, CT 06901
(203) 348-7711

BRIDGEPORT

10 Middle St. Suite 1101
Bridgeport, CT 06604
(203) 334-5106