

For the 2016-17 year, we are hosting our second AmeriCorps VISTA member, Elena Karis, whose work focuses on building community capacity around food security and nutrition education – issues that surfaced from the 2014 Claremont Health Survey.

### *Community Garden*

To increase access to healthy food, Elena has continued the former VISTA's project to develop a second, more accessible community garden in Claremont. [Valley Regional Hospital](#) generously donated a parcel of their land and other resources to support this project. After consulting a landscape architect, folks at Sugar River Valley Regional Technical Center (SRVRTC), and many local nonprofits to plan, design, and construct the garden, we now have four raised beds. Woodshop and welding students at SRVRTC also donated their labor to build a toolshed for the garden. Four local organizations – Valley Regional Hospital, 4-H, [Claremont Cool Cats](#) Special Olympics team, and [West Central Behavioral Health](#) – have begun planting in the beds. In phase two of the garden project, we will add more beds so more organizations and individuals can come learn about gardening and connect with each other.

### *Nutrition Education*

In the fall of 2015, we launched Healthy Vibrant Kids (HVK), an evidence-based, modular nutrition education program, in Claremont schools. The program, now known as [Build Healthy Kids](#), is designed to provide kids with easily digestible information that hones in on key messages based on federal dietary guidelines. Elena communicates these messages through monthly newsletters for elementary students and their parents.

In an effort to expand the reach of BHK messages to students of all ages, Elena has partnered with the OWLS alternative high school program to teach monthly nutrition and cooking lessons based on the monthly themes. She is currently working with the Keene State Dietetic Internship program to develop a curriculum for use by future volunteer instructors. Elena will also continue an afterschool program for Claremont Middle School, called *Chopped*. Inspired by the TV show, *Chopped* is designed to engage middle school students in a healthy and productive way once a month with a healthy snack and a nutrition-related, monthly themed activity. Beyond reinforcing BHK messages, these activities enable students to be more thoughtful about their food choices while building culinary skills and developing meaningful relationships with other members of the community.

### *Soup Kitchen Programming*

An ongoing partnership with the Claremont Soup Kitchen and Food Pantry is focused on bringing nutrition education and cooking instruction to individuals with chronic disease as well as patrons of the Soup Kitchen. For example, we are in discussions with UNH Cooperative Extension and New Hampshire Food Bank to bring the *Nutrition Connections: Cooking Matters* series to the Soup Kitchen. We have also received a commitment from the Dartmouth Organic Farm to provide 15 bags of fresh produce weekly throughout their 2016 growing season for participants of a Soup Kitchen cooking program. The Claremont Food Club, started in 2014 by a ReThink intern and MPH student at The Dartmouth Institute for Health Policy & Clinical Practice, had another successful run in 2016.