

Programs	Homes for Computers Summer Fan Program Air Conditioner Exchange Lunch in the Park Christmas in July	School Supplies Warm Up Columbia Christmas Program Youth Enrichment Fund
Health	Prescriptions Medical/dental co-pays Gas for medical appointments CATS bus tickets for medical appointments Eyeglasses Emergency food Hygiene/household products Diapers	Baby formula Car seat referrals (Kohl's Safety Store) Clothing referrals (The Wardrobe) AC Exchange Summer Fan Program Warm up Columbia Back-to-School Health Fair
Education	Homes for Computers Youth Enrichment Fund Back-to-School Health Fair School supplies	
Employment	Gas for work CATS bus tickets Missouri birth certificates Driver's licenses	State I.D.'s Minor car repair Required work uniforms for new jobs
Housing	AC exchange Summer Fan Program Emergency overnight motel stay Rental assistance	
Community Resources	Volunteer info Helping Hands Catalog Directory of Community Services HERO Awards	
Info & Referral	In-Office and Phone Referrals	
Funding	City of Columbia Boone County United Way FISH Fund Boone Electric Community Trust Emergency Solutions Grants FEMA	

Homes for Computers

Voluntary Action Center's Homes for Computers program provides reformatted computers donated by the City of Columbia to Columbia families with children in grades K-12. VAC partners with the City of Columbia and the Downtown Optimist Club to put on this program. In 2013, 30 families received a computer, and to date, 380 computers have been given through this program.

Families apply to receive computers between mid-January and mid-February at VAC. Computer distribution takes place at the Downtown Optimist "Friend of Youth" building (1201 Grand Ave.) in late February. At that time, recipients receive training on Internet safety for both children and adults.

Free introductory computer courses are also available on a regular basis at the Daniel Boone Regional Library to help families become more familiar with basic hardware and software components of their computers.

This program will distribute only computers donated by the City of Columbia. VAC is not able to accept other computer donations at this time.

Summer Fan Program

Every year Voluntary Action Center collaborates with the KOMU-TV NBC Fan Club and Lowe's to provide fans for low-income families during the hot summer months. Preference is given to those susceptible to heat, including families with small children, pregnant women, and elderly or disabled people. In 2012, 445 fans were distributed through this program.

Households may receive one new fan every other year as funds are available. Fans are provided solely through donations. VAC accepts donations of both new fans and used fans in good condition as well as monetary donations to purchase fans from Home Depot, which provides VAC with a discount for this program. Those who would like to give a fan or a monetary donation should contact VAC or drop fans off at the VAC office.

Air Conditioner Exchange

Every summer VAC works together with the Columbia Water and Light Department and Boone Electric on the air conditioner exchange program. This program allows low-income Columbia Water and Light and Boone Electric customers to swap their older, less efficient, or broken window air conditioner units for new ones that are more energy efficient. This helps them both to stay cooler and to save money on utility bills. Exchange of old units and pick-up of new units both take place at VAC. All of the old air conditioners are disposed of properly and recycled by the city. In 2012, this program provided 85 replacement air conditioner window units.

Lunch in the Park

Lunch in the Park is a summer program that provides free, healthy lunches and enriching educational programs for low-income children. These lunches take place between 11:30 a.m. and 1 p.m. Monday through Friday at Douglass Park between mid-June and mid-August. The Columbia/Boone County Health Department and Parks and Recreation provide these lunches, and VAC coordinates the volunteer servers.

The educational programs are provided by groups such as Girl Scouts, TRYPS, the Central Missouri Humane Society, CARE Gallery, the library bookmobile, and the Missouri Department of Conservation. During the 2012 summer, 3,119 lunches were served through this program.

Those who would like to volunteer a lunch hour or two of their time should contact VAC at 874-2273.

Christmas in July

VAC's Christmas in July is a yearly event that provides a Christmas-themed picnic for local low-income families and includes an opportunity for children to visit with Santa Claus, who distributes gifts. In recent years, this event has been held at Missouri United Methodist Church. It usually serves between 300 and 400 local residents.

Christmas in July, which began in 1992, increases awareness that there are needs all year long, not just during the holidays. Additionally, it helps raise funds for VAC to provide basic needs and emergency services to Boone County's low-income residents.

People support this important event and fundraiser by purchasing raffle tickets. The ticket donation is \$10 for one ticket or \$75 for ten. Each ticket purchased will provide a meal for a child or adult at the picnic and will enter the donor's name in a drawing for prizes.

School Supplies

Back-to-School Health Fair

The Back-to-School Health Fair, which is held every August and coordinated by HealthCare USA, helps local K-12 students prepare for the start of the new school year. Students at the fair receive free vision and hearing screenings, dental check-ups, and mental health exams. They also receive free school supplies, backpacks, and haircuts. Additionally, the fair, which takes place at Calvary Baptist Church, includes refreshments, entertainment, games, and information sessions. VAC, which is responsible for providing and distributing the school supplies, collaborates with nearly 20 companies and community groups to put on this event. In its most successful year, the fair served roughly 2,000 local students.

In-Office School Supplies

School supplies are also available for pick-up at Voluntary Action Center every August. These supplies, which are for local children from low-income families, include items such as notebooks, crayons, scissors, calculators, and pencils. Different sets of supplies are available for elementary, middle, and high school. In 2012, over 700 children received school supplies. Those who would like to donate school supplies should call VAC at 874-2273.

Warm Up Columbia

Warm Up Columbia is an annual drive coordinated by VAC and churches in our community. Warm items such as coats, blankets, scarves, gloves, hats, and socks are collected and given to low-income families, elderly, homeless, and disabled individuals.

Items are collected at Commerce Bank and at participating churches. Public distribution of collected items then takes place on a Saturday morning in October at the Armory (701 East Ash Street). Items are given out on a first come, first served basis. In 2012, more than 5,000 winter items were collected for more than 700 local people.

Those who would like to volunteer for the sorting or distribution of coats and blankets should call VAC at 874-2273. Those whose churches or businesses would like to coordinate a coat and blanket drive as a part of this effort should also contact VAC.

Christmas Program

VAC's Christmas Program provides families and elderly or disabled individuals who live alone with Christmas gifts and food for the holidays. This is VAC's single largest program. In 2012, the Christmas Program served 1,139 families, or 3,790 individuals. 2013 will mark the 30th annual Christmas Program.

In September and October of each year, families and individuals who meet eligibility requirements register at VAC or other agencies to participate in the program. In November, these participants are matched with organizations, individuals, and families who wish to sponsor them. These sponsors provide food for the entire family for Christmas and at least one new gift for each child or, in households without children, for each elderly or disabled person.

In December, VAC works with the help of volunteers to coordinate the gift and food collection and distribution, which takes place at Trinity Presbyterian Church. Those who would like to serve as sponsors or volunteer their time should call VAC at 874-2273.

Youth Enrichment Fund

Voluntary Action Center's Youth Enrichment Fund allows children 18 and under from low-income families to participate in activities that they would otherwise be unable to access. VAC staff members identify eligible families who come to the VAC office and also work closely with local schools, social service agencies, and youth organizations to identify children in the community who would benefit from this fund. YEF scholarships go toward:

- Baseball, basketball, soccer, and football programs
- Camp fees
- Sports team uniforms
- College application and testing fees
- Summer school fees for math, reading, and music classes
- Instrument rental fees and lessons for music students
- Art, dance, theater, karate, swimming, and gymnastics classes
- Registration fees for classes related to a child's identified special talent
- Therapeutic learning equipment for disabled children
- Caps and gowns for high school graduation

VAC pays up to 90% of the cost of the programs, not to exceed \$50.

The YEF provides opportunities for children to experience activities that develop individual skills, offer interaction with positive adult role models, and encourage teambuilding and friendship. In 2012, 235 scholarships were given through the YEF.

Health

Prescriptions

VAC helps cover the cost of prescription medicine and medical equipment for income-eligible Boone County residents. Social service specialists call pharmacies (usually Kilgore's, Wal-Mart or D&H) to verify prices, then write vouchers for clients. Kilgore's often discounts the prescription costs for patients receiving VAC services. Prescription assistance comes from the FISH and BET funds. In 2012, VAC helped cover the cost of 742 prescriptions.

Medical and dental co-pays

VAC helps cover the cost of medical and dental examinations for income-eligible Boone County residents. Clients bring in proof of the appointment cost, which VAC covers with a check or voucher. Medical and dental assistance comes from the FISH and BET funds. In 2012, VAC covered the cost of 223 medical and dental co-pays.

Gas for medical appointments

VAC helps clients afford gas for transportation to medical appointments. To be eligible, clients must have a medical appointment that day or the next. Gas assistance usually ranges between \$5 and \$10 per visit. Social service specialists call Break Time to arrange the payment. Gas assistance comes from the FISH and BET funds (or VET for veterans).

CATS bus tickets

Bus tickets are also available for transportation to medical appointments. These are covered by the FISH Fund. Clients usually can receive up to 24 tickets per household in a year.

Prescription eyeglasses

VAC helps provide prescription eyeglasses for income-eligible Boone County residents. A client brings an estimate showing the cost of the glasses, and a VAC social service specialist writes a check or voucher. Eyeglass assistance comes from the FISH and BET funds.

Emergency food

Canned and packaged nonperishable emergency food is available through the VAC pantry. Income-eligible Boone County residents may receive food from the pantry twice in a 12-month period. When clients come in for food, social service specialists also give them a list of other food pantries in the area. The food pantry is supported by community members' donations of nonperishable food and by Food Bank allocations.

Hygiene/household products

VAC provides income-eligible Boone County residents with hygiene packs that include items like toilet paper, toothpaste, shampoo, and soap. Clients may receive these hygiene packs twice in a 12-month period. Most of the hygiene packs are provided to VAC by the Assistance League of Mid-Missouri. Community members can also contribute to this service by providing cleaning, hygiene, and laundry products.

Diapers

Diapers are available at VAC for income-eligible Boone County residents. Clients receive 10 diapers per household per visit and may receive these diapers twice in a 12-month period. Community members can contribute to this service by contributing #4 and #5 size diapers.

Baby formula

VAC provides baby formula, either from the VAC pantry or through vouchers to Wal-Mart. This service is covered by the FISH and BET funds, and vouchers are usually worth \$20 of formula. Clients may receive formula or vouchers twice in a 12-month period, and they must be enrolled in the Health Department's Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) Program.

Car seat referrals

VAC screens clients for eligibility to receive car seats from the Kohl's Safety Store. On the fourth Friday of every month, the Safety Store is open for these clients to pick up their car seats by appointment.

Clothing referrals

VAC refers income-eligible clients to The Wardrobe (715 Park Ave.), a Columbia consignment store. On Tuesdays, these clients can pick out clothing for free at The Wardrobe. Referrals to this store are valid for one year.

[Summer Fan Program](#)

[AC exchange](#)

[Warm Up Columbia](#)

[Back-to-School Health Fair](#)

Education

[*Homes for Computers*](#)

[*Youth Enrichment Fund*](#)

[*Back-to-School Health Fair*](#)

[*School supplies*](#)

Employment

Gas for work

VAC helps clients afford gas for transportation to work. To be eligible, clients must be currently employed, have a valid driver's license, and be headed to work that day or the next. Gas assistance usually ranges between \$5 and \$10 per visit, and social service specialists arrange the payment through vouchers to Break Time. Gas assistance comes from the FISH and BET funds (or VET for veterans).

CATS bus tickets

Bus tickets are also available for transportation to work. These are covered by the City fund or, for those outside city limits, by the FISH and BET funds. A household usually can receive up to 40 tickets in a year. In 2012, VAC provided 4,720 bus tickets for work.

Missouri birth certificates

VAC can help Missouri-born clients get copies of their birth certificates. Social service specialists write a \$15 check from VAC to the Health Department to cover this cost. This service is covered by the FISH and BET funds and is available to clients once in a lifetime.

Driver's licenses and state I.D.'s

VAC covers the cost of driver's licenses or state I.D.'s (through checks to the Department of Revenue) after clients get the appropriate DMV paperwork filled out. This service is covered by the FISH and BET funds and is available to clients once in a lifetime.

Minor car repair

Employed clients are eligible for minor car repairs that will enable them get to work. Clients must bring a driver's license, proof of car ownership, and a repair estimate. A social service specialist calls the repair shop to confirm details and writes a check. Car repair costs comes from the City and BET funds and cannot exceed \$100 per client in a 12-month period.

Required work uniforms for new jobs

Clients who are beginning new jobs are eligible for a voucher to Wal-Mart that will cover the costs of one required uniform set. Uniform costs come from the FISH and BET funds. In 2012, VAC provided 98 clothing items for work.

Housing

[AC exchange](#)

[Summer Fan Program](#)

Emergency overnight motel stay

When local shelters do not have space available for clients, VAC can provide them with a one- to three-night stay at America's Best Value Inn (1718 N. Providence, across the street from VAC). This service is usually reserved for families with children and is available once in a 12-month period and no more than two or three times in a lifetime. Families who receive this service should have a housing plan for when the one- to three-night stay is up. Motel costs come from the FEMA, FISH, and BET funds. In 2012, VAC provided 29 short-term emergency motel stays.

Rental assistance

To prevent homelessness, VAC provides rental assistance to income-eligible Boone County residents who are behind on their rent payments or need funds to move into a new location. Clients must demonstrate that they were unable to pay rent due to a onetime emergency or circumstance (i.e., are not chronically behind on rent). Additionally, they must demonstrate how they will be able to pay their monthly rent in the future.

Preference is given to clients who live in federally subsidized housing, were referred by agencies or caseworkers, need the funds to pay their first month's rent, or have children living with them.

This service, which began in 2011, is funded by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and the Emergency Solutions Grant (ESG). It is available when VAC has funds on hand. In 2012, 73 families were provided with rental assistance through VAC.

Community Resources

Directory of Community Services

The Directory of Community Services lists and describes hundreds of social service agencies and organizations that serve Boone County. Its purpose is to facilitate cooperation among organizations and provide improved services to clients.

Each organization's directory description includes details such as its services, hours, fees, eligibility, intake procedures, and required documentation. An index at the back of the directory provides an easy way to search by specific client populations, problems, or services. In addition to agency descriptions, the directory includes separate sections for self-help, support, and advocacy groups; hotlines and helplines; and a list of the Boone County Public Schools.

This directory is available for \$25 at the VAC office (or by mail) and serves as an indispensable resource for those involved in social services in the county.

Helping Hand Catalog

This free catalog lists volunteer opportunities and contact information for hundreds of organizations that support Boone County. It links volunteers with opportunities from organizations dedicated to the aged; animals/nature; basic needs and low-income support; the community, arts, and culture; education; health care and support; special needs; and youth. Helping Hand is available for pickup at the VAC office and many other places around the community, such as the library, the University of Missouri campus, and various churches. VAC will also mail one copy upon request.

Volunteer Info

VAC is a volunteer information center, providing volunteer recruitment, recognition, and information in Boone County. Students, newcomers, teachers, business leaders, and service groups can contact VAC to find volunteer

opportunities. Volunteer opportunities are also published in VAC's free Helping Hand Catalog, the quarterly newsletter, and "Get Involved," a weekly listing in the Columbia Daily Tribune. In addition, the VAC website provides information about hundreds of opportunities to volunteer with local organizations. VAC also provides volunteer information at area volunteer fairs.

HERO Awards

The HERO Awards, which are sponsored by the Columbia Daily Tribune and Landmark Bank and supported by VAC, are presented annually to individuals and groups doing exceptional volunteer work in Boone County. Volunteers may be nominated in February by anyone in the community. Award categories include: individual, adult group, youth, outstanding volunteer in education/literacy, outstanding volunteer in health care, outstanding volunteer in community protection, and outstanding volunteer in the arts. A panel of community leaders selects the winners.

Nominees and winners are recognized at an annual reception in April. Every nominee receives a commemorative award, and each first-place winner receives a \$400 grant for the organization where he or she volunteers.

Information and Referral

In-Office and Phone Referrals

In addition to VAC's own services and programs, VAC serves as an information hub to refer clients to other agencies and organizations that provide needed services within the county. VAC's social service specialists are knowledgeable about other organizations' offerings and, as a result, are able to better serve clients.

VAC is recognized as a member of the Alliance of Information and Referral Systems, an international professional society for groups involved in community information and referral. In 2012, VAC received and responded to more than 7,000 phone calls and more than 10,000 in-office visits requesting information about other resources in Boone County.

[Directory of Community Services](#)

Funding

City of Columbia

The City of Columbia provides funds to organizations that address the causes and effects of poverty. VAC secures City funds (which come from the City's Social Service Funding) through periodic requests, and these funds go toward VAC's operating expenses. In addition, City funds go toward essential transportation services — providing bus tickets and covering car repair costs for employed clients of VAC.

Boone County

Boone County provides funds to organizations that address the causes and effects of poverty. VAC secures county funds (which come from the county's Social Service Funding) through periodic requests, and these funds go toward VAC's operating expenses.

United Way, Heart of Missouri

United Way provides funds to organizations that focus on the community impact areas of education, income, health, and safety net (responding to emergency needs and promoting volunteerism). VAC secures United Way funds through periodic requests, and these funds go toward VAC's operating expenses.

FISH Fund

The FISH Fund is supported by both the Interfaith Council of Churches and by individuals. VAC is its sole administer. It covers the costs of services and items such as prescription assistance, medical and dental co-pays, emergency food, hygiene items, baby formula, birth certificates, driver's licenses, state I.D.'s, work uniforms, bus tickets, and emergency motel stays.

Boone Electric Community Trust

Funds from the Boone Electric Community Trust, which was established to improve the quality of life of community members, go toward direct aid for VAC clients. They usually cover higher cost (or more unusual) needs than those covered by the FISH Fund. These needs include assistance with rent and shelter, transportation needs, coverage for medical services, job training needs, emergency or disaster-related needs, and miscellaneous services. At least 70% of BET funds go toward Boone County residents who live outside the city limits because City fund services are often available only those who live within the city limits.

Emergency Solutions Grant

The Emergency Solutions Grants Program was created by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development to provide funds for emergency shelters and transitional housing that help people reach independent living. The funds that VAC receives from this grant go toward the rental assistance program.

FEMA

Funds provided by the Federal Emergency Management Agency go toward direct aid for VAC clients. They help cover the cost of emergency motel stays and rental assistance.