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ACCOUNTING & AUDIT

A Passion for Community Action

As the finance director for the Access Community Action Agency (www.accessagency.org), and a lifelong Connecticuter, Parker Stevens has seen how many of his neighbors in and around the city of Willimantic are in need of assistance. Serving Windham ...

Apr. 18, 2019



Accounting professionals are often stereotyped as number crunching automatons, working a rigid schedule and producing cold, factual analyses that represent the financial condition of a business or organization. Of course, those in the profession also know it as a vibrant people-centric role that helps many small business owning families thrive. But accounting can also be an altruistic endeavor.

By many measures, Connecticut is a wealthy state, with the 6th highest household median income. But it continues to experience one of the greatest income disparities in the nation. The state's most densely-populated area, near the New York metro area, gradually fades into more rural and agricultural regions as you move east and north. These areas have not shared in recent economic upturns, instead seeing once vibrant mill towns and industrial centers languish in high unemployment, even as new residents move in from other regions.

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As the finance director for the Access Community Action Agency (www.accessagency.org), and a lifelong Connecticuter, Parker Stevens has seen how many of his neighbors in and around the city of Willimantic are in need of

assistance. Serving Windham and Tolland Counties, the nonprofit helps provide families and at-risk youth and senior citizens with access to *nutritious* food, housing, down payment assistance, home heating aid, childcare, job training and personal finance training, giving them resources to move them toward greater self-reliance. The agency also provides accounting services to other area nonprofits.

Watch a video of Access at <https://youtu.be/B3DR-d-Do8k>.

Running each of these programs takes time, staff, volunteers and money. Overall, the Access Agency has a staff of 90 paid staff and interns, dozens of volunteers, and an annual budget of about \$12 million, which is divided among more than 20 distinct service programs. As the finance director, it's Parker's job to properly manage the state and federal grants they receive, and to properly manage the books. This includes special charts of accounts for properties that fall under HUD reporting requirements.

The agency was an early adopter of the AccuFund nonprofit accounting suite (www.accufund.com) for its financial management needs, using modules for fund accounting, grants management, government contracting, receivables, purchase orders, GL and a fully-customizable reporting system. Parker first joined the staff as an accounting intern in 2014, and since that time has moved into the lead financial role in the organization. As director, he has adopted more AccuFund modules, and helped the agency end its reliance on error-prone manual spreadsheets.

The system also offers secure remote access functions. Parker says this helps the organization's financial and managerial users access the program and keep connected to reporting and purchasing functions from any of the organization's multiple locations. AccuFund has also helped the team achieve a mostly paperless office.

Parker didn't plan on a career in nonprofit accounting, first trying for a more traditional route working for a local tax firm after he earned his BS in accounting from Eastern Connecticut State University, and later his Master's. But when he landed at Access, he saw that he could actually make a difference in his community.

"I really like what I'm doing, there's new stuff every day, and Access is really making a difference in people's lives," he said. "We are pretty lean in the finance department, and we couldn't do what we do without AccuFund. The system automates so much that would otherwise be manual and prone to errors."

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