

 Northern Light SM Eastern Maine Medical Center

Community Engagement

2024-2025 ANNUAL REPORT



Our Vision



Volunteers at our annual recognition dinner.

The Community Engagement department plays a vital role in connecting Northern Light Eastern Maine Medical Center with the broader community through programs that foster volunteerism, education, and professional growth. Our work spans initiatives that support patients and families, strengthen healthcare pathways, and create opportunities for individuals to explore and advance careers in healthcare.

Volunteers are the backbone of our efforts and essential partners in delivering compassionate care. They assist patients, support families, and work alongside staff to uphold our mission of caring, competence, and dignity. Their dedication creates a welcoming environment, enhances the patient experience, and allows our medical center to extend its reach and impact far beyond what staff alone could achieve.

The department also creates opportunities for future healthcare professionals through internships, job shadowing, sponsorships, and scholarship programs—building pathways that support talent development and excellence in care.

Fiscal Year Highlights

Hosted more than 80 students for observation, totaling nearly 600 hours of firsthand experience

Volunteers gave over 17,500 hours of service

28 therapy dog teams donated over 1,500 hours of service

Welcomed over 450 students from more than 15 schools for career exploration events

223 volunteers, including 94 high school students, recorded service hours

Gave away over 27,000 pounds of food to our community

People



Therapy dog Dobby poses as co-artist with staff during a hospital week activity.

Northern Light Eastern Maine Medical Center volunteers represent a vibrant and diverse group, ranging in age from 14 to 90—from high school students to retirees across Greater Bangor. Volunteers are united by a shared commitment to giving back and supporting our mission to make healthcare work for everyone. They place patients and families at the heart of their service while assisting staff in delivering exceptional care. We proudly celebrate the contributions of every member of our volunteer team.

These dedicated individuals bring their talents to a variety of roles, including clerical and administrative support, direct patient interaction, enrichment activities, and essential tasks at both our State Street hospital and the Lafayette Family Cancer Institute in Brewer.

Celebrating Exceptional Service

On the evening of Thursday, June 5, the Community Engagement Team gathered at Blue Sky Lounge in Bangor to celebrate the heart of our hospital—our incredible volunteers—who gave more than 17,500 hours of compassionate service this year. Every one of those hours tells a story: of presence, of kindness, and of people quietly showing up when it matters most.

Thank you to our keynote speaker, Darmita Wilson, vice president of Medical Education, for reminding us that the most powerful moments of service are the ones no one sees—where love is offered freely, without applause.

We were proud to present the **2025 Larry Malone Luminary Volunteer of the Year Award to Brooke Ismail** for her exceptional work supporting cancer patients through the Image Project. Additionally, it was a privilege to celebrate everyone who reached a service milestone this year, including Ellen Port, NICU cuddler, who has been added to our medical center's Volunteer Honor Board with 3,000 hours of lifetime service, as well as 2022 Luminary winner Herbert Skidgel Sr., who reached 14,000 hours of lifetime service.

To all of our volunteers: you are the light in our hospital halls, the warmth in someone's hardest day, and the quiet heroes behind our healing mission. Every hour you've given has touched a life.



Volunteers at our annual appreciation dinner at the Bangor Grande Hotel.

2025 Larry Malone Luminary Awardee: Brooke Ismail

For almost seven years, we have had the privilege of calling this month's Volunteer of the Month a part of our team. Always reporting for volunteer work at Northern Light Cancer Care with a smile and cheerful attitude, Brooke Ismail is a ray of sunshine in what many consider to be our patients' darkest times. Brooke's volunteer work centers around fitting cancer patients with wigs. Additionally, she teaches a skincare and makeup application class to individuals in cancer treatment, helping patients face the world with a little more self-care and positivity.

Her colleagues sing her praises, sharing "She's just amazing. She's so dedicated to our patients and makes sure she is available when they need her. I think sometimes she spends more time here with our patients than she does at home!"

Brooke, your extraordinary efforts do not go unnoticed! Thank you for consistently going above and beyond. Your unique approach and commitment to excellence make you an invaluable member of our team. Your compassion and creativity remind us that healing is not only medical, it's deeply human.



Congratulations, Brooke, on being selected for the 2025 Larry Malone Luminary Award, and to all our nominees!

2025 Luminary Award Nominees



Brooke Ismail, Luminary awardee, seen here at the annual recognition dinner with the Community Engagement team.



Patrick Taber



Laurence Wade



Lee White

The **Larry Malone Luminary Award** celebrates the Northern Light Eastern Maine Medical Center volunteer community by honoring an individual who demonstrates extraordinary compassion, dedication, kindness, and generosity of spirit, helping to light the way for improved patient experience through their volunteer service.

Congratulations to all of this year's Luminary nominees! We are so grateful for the difference you make for our patients, staff, and volunteer community.

Writing the Next Chapter of Healthcare

At Northern Light Eastern Maine Medical Center, our Community Engagement team believes every experience is a story waiting to be written. This summer, we welcomed the largest group of high student volunteers in our program's history. This year, **94 students** from 13 area high schools chose to write a powerful new chapter with us. Together, they dedicated **nearly 6,000 hours of service**—a monetary value of \$208,740—to the medical center across 25 hospital departments, with each act of service becoming a sentence in the larger story of compassion and care.

Their pages were filled with variety, assisting in imaging, supporting Food and Nutrition Services, delivering trays, making hospital-wide deliveries, and even escorting patients to the butterfly garden for a moment of calm. Each role was a paragraph in a collective chapter of teamwork, kindness, and growth.



And, every story has standout characters—those whose leadership, dedication, and heart leave an imprint on every page. This year, we are proud to honor Jessica Murphy with the 2025 Sparks Scholarship Award.

Jessica has been part of our volunteer program for three years, contributing nearly 400 hours of service. Known for her perseverance, commitment, and sense of humor, Jessica carries a thoughtful heart and compassionate spirit that lifts those around her. Jessica's story is already inspiring, and it is clear the chapters still to come will be extraordinary. She has become part of our book here at Northern Light Eastern Maine Medical Center – written into the lives of the staff she supported and the patients she touched.

This summer was more than just a program. It was a chapter worth rereading, filled with stories of service, growth, and hope for the future of healthcare. Though our students now turn the page to new beginnings, the words they left with us will always remain part of the story of Eastern Maine Medical Center.

Thank you to all 94 students for spending your summer with us, and we hope to see many of you again next year!

Inspired to Make a Difference



Student managers gathered at the medical center after presenting their passion projects.

One of the most memorable chapters of this summer came when our 10 student managers presented their passion projects before hospital executive leadership. Their creativity, professionalism, and vision impressed everyone in the room.

The projects included:

- **Healthcare Peer Support Program:** writing a new story of resilience by giving staff a place to turn in moments of burnout.
- **Stems for Smiles:** adding floral notes of kindness to the margins of patient and staff experiences.
- **Care Kits for the Unhoused:** extending our story of compassion beyond our walls to meet urgent needs in the community.

Each project added richness to the book of our medical center's mission and left a mark that will continue long after this summer's chapter has closed.

Community

This past year, Northern Light Eastern Maine Medical Center proudly expanded its community connections, supporting and collaborating with several inspiring local organizations. Our volunteers and staff have continued to make a meaningful difference beyond our hospital walls with the belief that serving our community is an essential part of who we are—because volunteering doesn't just strengthen others, it strengthens all of us.

New Community Connections

Best Buddies

We are proud to partner with Best Buddies, a program dedicated to creating opportunities for one-to-one friendships, integrated employment, and leadership development for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

Penobscot Theatre Company

Our partnership with Penobscot Theatre Company allows us to connect patients, families, and staff with performances and creative experiences that provide comfort, inspiration, and moments of joy, supporting emotional wellness throughout our community. Our staff volunteered to clean the theater and organize their props closet. In turn, they hosted our Pride Panel: Generations of Pride and collected food for our community cupboard.

Literacy Volunteers

Our partnership with Literacy Volunteers focuses on empowering individuals through education and connection. By providing compassionate tutoring and resources, Literacy Volunteers help community members build confidence in reading, writing, and communication—skills that open doors to brighter futures and improved well-being.

Pet Partners of Eastern Maine

Pet Partners of Eastern Maine brings the healing power of the human-animal bond to our patients, staff, and community. With trained therapy dog teams, this program provides comfort, reduces stress, and promotes emotional wellness through meaningful interactions, reminding us all of the joy and connection animals bring to our lives. EMMC was a silver sponsor for their Annual World's Largest Pet Walk that supports local programming. Additionally, staff volunteer at quarterly evaluations to help certify more local teams!



In August, our staff welcomed our Best Buddies for an art with therapy dogs event.

Auxiliary



Community Engagement is proud to be the liaison for the **Northern Light Eastern Maine Medical Center Auxiliary**, a dedicated group committed to social, philanthropic, and service activities that strengthen local healthcare.

This year, the Auxiliary celebrated a major milestone: the arrival of Miracle II, a state-of-the-art neonatal transport ambulance. After a three-year fundraising effort raising over \$125,000, the Auxiliary helped replace the original Miracle I with this mobile NICU, ensuring fragile infants across Maine receive lifesaving care. Staffed by skilled NICU nurses and LifeFlight professionals, this lifesaving resource was fully funded through the generosity of the Auxiliary, Professional Logging Contractors Northeast, Log A Load for Kids, and community donors—an inspiring example of teamwork and compassion.

"It's just a sense of pride and to know that people have as much investment in this as we do. It's really been a special thing to be part of," says Mikele Neal, associate vice president of patient care services and Auxiliary vice president.

Community

Community Volunteer Impact Team

Volunteers in our community make our world stronger and ensure a brighter future for our neighbors in need. Being of service to others is humbling, rewarding, and important. The pandemic highlighted some gaps in services within our communities, while also showing the generosity and spirit of our team members who are looking for ways to reach out and lend a helping hand. As a response, in 2021, all Northern Light Health member organizations launched Community Volunteer Impact Teams to extend our helping hands beyond the walls of our medical centers and facilities.

The vision of our Community Volunteer Impact Team is to build capacity to activate meaningful community health initiatives through employee-driven volunteerism, both inside the medical center and in the community, in collaboration with local organizations, helping to improve the health status of all people in Maine.

A steering committee oversees and guides the community projects the medical center pursues to ensure they align with system policies and are driven by our Community Health Strategy, which is developed using annual system and organizational goals.

The Community Volunteer Impact Team plays a vital role in strengthening both our relationship with community collaborators and our internal culture of care. By organizing service-driven and wellness-focused activities, the team encourages employees to take part in meaningful experiences that support their well-being and connection to one another. During Northern Light Health Week this year, highlights like art with therapy dogs, goat yoga, group Reiki, and chair massages provided staff with joyful moments of relaxation, stress relief, and shared community spirit. These efforts help create a workplace where people feel valued, supported, and inspired to give back.

In the last four years, the Northern Light Eastern Maine Medical Center Community Impact Team has sponsored over **160 events**. Our impact team has also grown to **150 employees** and our steering committee to nearly **20** passionate philanthropists. Each year, hundreds of our employees, with their friends and families, give back through our sponsored activities. We have contributed **over 1,750 hours of service** annually to our community.



Highlighted annual projects:

- Annual Food Drive: collected **7,100** pounds of food
- Secret Santa and Christmas is for kids: sponsored over **100** families
- Spread the Love: **400** handmade Valentine's Day cards to all **14** units
- Participation in the Pride Parade
- Therapy dog evaluations: **37** employees, **148** hours, **12** teams passed
- ICU/PICU provides over **100** meals with the Salvation Army every month

Service

Northern Light Eastern Maine Medical Center seeks to be a leader in our community. We regularly initiate and support activities that help us support our mission. This includes providing financial assistance, offering preventive screenings and healthcare education, supporting medical education, and more.

Community Cupboard: A year of Growth, Partnership, and Impact

In just one year, the Community Cupboard at Northern Light Eastern Maine Medical Center has grown into a vital resource for our hospital community, providing essential food support to staff, patients, and families in need. Thanks to the incredible generosity of our employees, volunteers, and community, the program has flourished and its benefits have been truly profound.

To further expand access to fresh and healthy options, we launched Fresh Produce Days, distributing over 10,000 pounds of fresh fruits and vegetables, with an average of about 1,000 pounds each month. These events bring a variety of nutritious produce, such as carrots, apples, peppers, and squash, directly to those who need it most.

In addition to these achievements, we placed 20 food donation bins throughout departments across the medical center, making it easier for staff to contribute to this initiative. Our teams rose to the challenge with the 10K Food Face Off Challenge, where departments competed to collect donations — resulting in an astounding 7,109 pounds of food collected.

A highlight of the year was welcoming Hannaford Supermarkets as an official community partner. After touring the cupboard and seeing firsthand the impact of this resource, Hannaford immediately stepped up in extraordinary ways:

- During the Food Face Off Challenge, Hannaford matched every pound of food donated with a monetary equivalent.
- Hannaford generously donated \$10,000 to support the ongoing needs of the Community Cupboard.
- Their Healthy Living team, in collaboration with dietitians, is creating tailored grocery guides to help patients and families make healthy choices for conditions such as diabetes, heart health, and cancer.
- A local Hannaford store will assist with stocking the pantry and supplement donations with gift cards for families to purchase additional items not available through the cupboard.
- Hannaford helped us redesign the cupboard's layout with new shelving to create a more welcoming, consumer-friendly experience.



Additionally, the cupboard received a \$5,000 grant from the Maine Credit Unions' Campaign for Ending Hunger, providing another boost to help sustain and expand its services.

The collective efforts of our staff, partners, and community have transformed the Community Cupboard into a thriving hub of support that not only provides food but also strengthens the sense of care and connection at the heart of Northern Light Eastern Maine Medical Center. Together, we are building a healthier, more compassionate future — one meal at a time.



Total Impact since opening:

- Over 3,000 individuals served
- Over 1,000 households supported
- Over 15,000 pounds of food distributed to our community
- Over 12,000 pounds of fresh produce given to our community

Growth

In addition to supporting pathways of growth for our medical center workforce, Community Engagement continues to expand our programming and create more opportunities to welcome new volunteers and community partnerships.

Expanding Services

Stems for Smiles: Brightening Days Across the Medical Center

As part of our 2025 Student Passion Projects, high school volunteers launched Stems for Smiles, a heartfelt initiative delivering single-stem flowers and handwritten notes to patients and staff. With support from community partners like Lori's Gifts, Blended Blossoms, and Lougee & Fredericks, the program quickly blossomed. In its first 48 hours, students fulfilled over 60 staff nominations and delivered 100 flowers. Now an ongoing Volunteer Services program, Stems for Smiles continues to spread gratitude and joy throughout the medical center—one stem at a time.

Beacons of Hope for Kids: Supporting Grieving Youth

This spring, the Community Engagement team launched Beacons of Hope for Kids, an eight-week pilot program offering compassionate support for children and families navigating grief. Sponsored by Children's Miracle Network and delivered in partnership with All Souls Congregation, the program provided a safe and creative space for healing through activities like storytelling, art, and nature-based projects. Seven youths and four families participated, finding connection and resilience through shared experiences. Feedback was overwhelmingly positive, laying the foundation for future sessions each spring and fall.



2025 Youth Mental Health Summit: Empowering Voices, Building Resilience

This year's Youth Mental Health Summit brought together 75 students, educators, healthcare professionals, and community partners for a day of dialogue and connection. Featuring interactive workshops, peer discussions, and a national keynote speaker, the event advanced our mission to amplify young voices, reduce stigma, and strengthen mental wellness across generations.

Finance

Community Engagement is a value-added service and is not revenue-producing. The department operates on a fixed budget tailored to our present needs and maximized with creative programming and people equity. However, the Independent Sector, a national group that gathers data on valuing non-profit volunteer time, currently values an hour of volunteer service at **\$34.79**. Based on service hours donated and logged, our volunteers provided **\$565,143** of added value this year.

Growth



MCI Experiential Learning Opportunities students their first day at EMMC.

Inspiring the Next Generation of Healthcare

Every summer, the halls of Northern Light Eastern Maine Medical Center come alive with the energy of young people discovering what it means to make a difference. Though they often arrive nervous, they are eager, drawn by curiosity, compassion, and the hope of finding their place in healthcare. What begins as a volunteer shift often becomes something far more meaningful: a spark that ignites a lifelong calling.

Each year, more than 90 high school students trade in summer vacations for hospital badges and scrubs by joining our Student Volunteer Program. These students contribute thousands of hours across departments while gaining hands-on experience in a hospital setting, allowing them to see firsthand the collaboration and compassion that define modern healthcare. They greet

families, comfort patients, and learn that every small act, whether restocking supplies or sharing a smile, plays a role in someone's healing. That program, and the incredible students who have come through it, laid the foundation for a new chapter in 2024, when volunteer and development manager Katelyn Stoddard launched the Pathways in Healthcare initiative.

The hospital's Pathways in Healthcare initiative expands that mission year-round, bringing local high school classes into the hospital for experiential learning. Students observe procedures, participate in simulation lab experiences such as stroke response training, and engage with professionals across dozens of specialties, from interventional cardiology to radiology and respiratory care. These sessions bridge the gap between classroom learning and real-world application, turning curiosity into clarity about what a future in healthcare might hold. Partnerships with technical schools and universities extend these opportunities even further, offering tailored shadowing and mentorship experiences that help students prepare for careers in nursing, laboratory science, imaging, rehabilitation, and healthcare administration. Combined with career exploration fairs and outreach events across the region, these programs ensure that every student, no matter where they start, has access to explore, experience, and envision a place for themselves in healthcare.

In its first year, Pathways has already made an extraordinary impact. More than 450 students from across the region participated in career fairs and exploration events designed to help them envision a future in healthcare. The hospital solidified partnerships with the Medical Assisting program at United Technologies Center (UTC) and welcomed their students for volunteer service, while also launching its first experiential learning opportunities with students from Maine Central Institute (MCI). Beyond the classroom, the program hosted over 80 shadowing experiences, totaling nearly 600 hours of firsthand observation, each one offering a meaningful look at the real, human side of medicine. These moments of connection and discovery are already shaping Maine's next generation of healthcare professionals.

Across all these efforts runs a single belief: that the best way to inspire the next generation is to open our doors and hearts to them. When students walk our halls, they don't just see medicine in motion, they see purpose, teamwork, and the human side of healing.

"These programs were built from a simple hope," says Katelyn. "If even one student walks away feeling inspired to care for others—to see themselves as part of something bigger—then we've done our job. Watching them grow, return, and lead reminds me every day that the future of healthcare is already here, and it is bright."



Students tour our ORs and receive a demonstration of surgical instruments.

Goals for Fiscal Year 2026

- ✓ Host two extended learning opportunities and two Career Exploration Fairs
- ✓ Increase overall active volunteer team by 25%
- ✓ Complete 120 Student observations
- ✓ Expand music & art enrichment activities
- ✓ Engage 300 students and 15 high schools and colleges in Pathways programming
- ✓ Expand employee Volunteerism to 2,000 hours and 200 members support staff volunteer efforts
- ✓ Increase Youth Mental Health Summit to 100 students
- ✓ Integrate team-building service days for staff
- ✓ Distribute 2,500 food bags and expand frozen and fresh produce options
- ✓ Increase charity participation by 25% through interdepartmental competitions and matched donations
- ✓ Host two continuing education therapy dog training classes focused on grief & mental health care
- ✓ Create a leadership pathway for volunteers, including mentorship and recognition programs
- ✓ Expand number of Caring Calls participants to 60
- ✓ Participate in four community events highlighting our services & programs
- ✓ Expand animal-assisted therapy from two member organizations to seven member organizations
- ✓ Implement new tracking systems for impact data on volunteer hours, community partnerships, and program outcomes
- ✓ Expand animal-assisted therapy to four new community partners
- ✓ Increase individuals served through community cupboard by 20%

To learn more about any of the programs or initiatives shared in this Annual Report, or to support the team by becoming a volunteer, please contact the Community Engagement office at 207.973.6806.

Our Team

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*Pictured above from left to right: Liz Moores, Katelyn Stoddard,
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