



THE OFFICE OF COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT



ANNUAL REPORT

2024 - 2025



Dear Friends and Colleagues,

As another academic year draws to a close, we reflect with gratitude on what we've accomplished together, through powerful partnerships, immersive student learning, and a shared commitment to justice. Like our ever-expanding campus footprint, the work of community engagement also continues to grow at Sacred Heart University.

The goal of the Office of Community Engagement (OCE) is to connect campus and community resources, transform student understanding through experiential learning, and inspire civic action to build a more just, inclusive, and equitable world. This year, SHU students, faculty, and staff collectively contributed over 115,000 hours of community engagement. These efforts would not be possible without our dedicated partnerships with schools, nonprofits, faith communities, and civic leaders.

Included in these hours were those completed through our global service-learning programs, which expanded its geographic reach this year. In addition to our Colombia spring break trip, we also launched pilot programs in Dingle, Ireland and Nairobi, Kenya. Students across all programs engaged in service related to environmental justice, youth development, and refugee resettlement. In total, 22 students and 6 staff/faculty advisors participated across global service programs this academic year.

We also engaged over 500 students in weekly volunteer and community-based work-study placements, serving across sectors like healthcare, education, social services, and the arts. Meanwhile, our SHU Summer Service Challenge drew 150 participants, logging over 1,700 hours of work from June to August and helping maintain SHU-community connections during summer months.

We are proud of these milestones and excited for what lies ahead, including our continued work with our community partners through our campus-community listening sessions and recognition events.

We invite you to read the following report to learn more about our expanding programs, student impact, and future plans. Whether by email, phone, or a visit to our office, we look forward to hearing from you.

With gratitude,

Annie Johnson, Director

Arlete Perez Paez, Assistant Director

Erin Rederscheid, Coordinator of Community Partnerships



GRANTS & SCHOLARSHIPS

The Office of Community Engagement continues to support over 400 Pioneer Service Grant recipients, eight Community Scholars, 16 work study students, and countless volunteers in numerous student clubs and athletic teams with service requirements by connecting them with volunteer opportunities in Bridgeport.

PIONEER SERVICE GRANT – The Pioneer Service Grant is a service-based grant open to first-year students. It recognizes individuals who demonstrated a strong commitment to service before arriving at Sacred Heart University and who plan to stay actively involved while at SHU. Recipients are required to complete a minimum of 30 hours of community engagement during the academic year. The program aims to connect students with service opportunities in the Greater Bridgeport area.

8,864
HOURS LOGGED

COMMUNITY SCHOLARS – The Community Scholars Grant is a service & financial aid-based grant available to upperclassmen that requires 100 hours of community service. Recipients are chosen based on prior commitment to service in the community and their intentions to pursue long-term commitment to volunteering.

753
HOURS LOGGED

AVERAGE
WEEKLY **27**
OPPORTUNITIES OFFERED

COMMUNITY-BASED WORK STUDY – Students who accept community-based work-study roles support and engage with our community partners while receiving federal funding. They have the opportunity to work with staff at local nonprofits, such as Nourish Bridgeport and LifeBridge. The Office of Community Engagement continues to assist in the implementation of the federal grant "America Reads, America Counts" by coordinating work-study sites at Bridgeport Public School and after-school programs.

11,572

HOURS LOGGED

\$188,677

IN EMPLOYMENT FUNDS

MENTORING PROGRAMS

ACADEMIC MENTORING PROGRAM – The Office of Community Engagement celebrated the completion of its twenty-second year implementing the Academic Mentoring Program (AMP) at John Winthrop School. The program is financed by the Jones Zimmerman Foundation, which funds various trips and activities. The Community Engagement Office successfully applied for and received \$65,000 from the Marie and John Zimmerman fund for the 2024-2025 academic year. SHU students spent multiple days each week working with their John Winthrop mentees, providing academic and social support. The year was completed with 16 Sacred Heart University mentors working with 31 John Winthrop students in grades 6-8. Students from SHU and their mentees took part in engaging, hands-on enrichment activities and exciting weekend field trips to a variety of destinations, including the Maritime Aquarium, where they explored marine life, and an adventurous zip-lining experience. The program also collaborated with the Women's Rugby team and SHU Athletics, leading an interactive rugby workshop for participants.

"AMP has truly been one of the best experiences of my life, it's more than just a job, it's my favorite part of my week! Twice a week I get to watch two special gals grow academically into young ladies in society and it's been an honor!"

Emma Sulkowski, Class of 2026

"I enjoy mentoring because it gives me the opportunity to provide hands on assistance to students both academically and socially. It is so rewarding when you are helping a mentee out with homework and they are so proud to show us they did well on a test. Knowing that we have an impact on these girls is extremely heartwarming."

Victoria Grillo, Class of 2026

THE GERALDINE JOHNSON PROGRAM – This program continued to run this year as an all-girls mentoring program. There were a total of 14 female students including eight fourth graders, six fifth graders, and six SHU mentors who attended the program at Geraldine Johnson School. The mentoring program is designed to help students academically and encourage female empowerment through enrichment activities and bonding with their mentors.

MENTORING PROGRAMS



The Office of Community Engagement sponsored two international service experiences during the spring semester. These week-long Global Service-Learning programs provided students with the opportunity to develop their involvement on a global scale. Between March 1-9, 2025, a total of 13 undergraduate students and four staff/faculty advisors participated in environmental justice, youth development, and refugee resettlement programming over spring break, in partnership with Uniminuto University in Ibagué, Colombia and SHU Dingle campus in Ireland. Another cohort of seven students and two advisors traveled to Nairobi, Kenya in May on a pilot program to partner with Catholic University of Eastern Africa, exploring youth enrichment and female empowerment initiatives.

DINGLE - Annie Johnson (Director of Community Engagement) and Mark Congdon (Communication Studies) spent a week of service at the SHU Campus in Dingle with eight undergraduate students offering a unique blend of community service and cultural immersion. Students were involved in afterschool programming, Ukrainian refugee support, and community festival preparation.

COLOMBIA – Arlete Perez Paez (Community Engagement Assistant Director) and Prof. Kate O'Gara (Political Science) traveled to Ibagué, Colombia, with five undergraduate students where they connected with the Casa Taller and the Jardín Infantil Salamandra (Salamandra Children's Garden), played activities with children, adults and seniors from the Bella neighborhood.

KENYA - Arlete Perez Paez (Community Engagement Assistant Director) and Jonix Owino (Psychology) traveled to Nairobi, Kenya in May with seven undergraduate students where they developed leadership skills, cross-cultural communication abilities and a sense of global citizenship.



COMMUNITY PARTNERS

Alpha Community Services YMCA
Alzheimer's Association
Big Brothers Big Sisters of CT
Books to Basketball: The Walter E.
Lockett Jr. Foundation, Inc.
Bridgeport Caribe Youth Leaders
Bridgeport North Branch Public Library
Bridgeport Public Education Fund, Inc.
Bridgeport Rescue Mission
Cardinal Shehan Center
Caroline House
Catholic Academy of Bridgeport
Catholic Charities of Fairfield County
Center for Family Justice
Connecticut Institute for Refugees and
Immigrants (CIRI)
Covenant School of Bridgeport
CT Blood Center
CT Foodshare
Discovery Magnet Elementary School
East Side Senior Center
Easton Community Center
Filling in the Blanks
Geraldine Johnson Elementary School
Gift of Life
Golden Hill Methodist Church
Green Village Initiative
Groundwork Bridgeport
Habitat for Humanity of Coastal Fairfield
County
Hall Neighborhood House
Homes for the Brave

Horizons @ SHU
James A. Welcome Law Firm
John Winthrop Elementary School
LifeBridge Community Services
McGivney Community Center
Mercy Learning Center
Michael Murray's Holiday Angels
Mosaic Senior Life
Norma Pfriem Breast Center
Northbridge Health Center
nOURish Bridgeport Inc.
Off the Streets
Operation Hope
Park City Magnet Elementary School
Real Food CT
RISE Program
Securing Safe Food
SHU's Discovery Science Center &
Planetarium
Special Olympics CT
Stamford Public Education Foundation
Sterling House Community Center
Stratford Volunteer Corps
St. Charles Roman Catholic Church
Thomas Merton Center
Tina Klem Serenity House
United Way of Coastal and Western CT
Urban Impact
U.S. Hunger
Wakeman Boys & Girls Club
Wilbur Cross Elementary School

COMMUNITY PARTNER

HIGHLIGHTS

Thrive Cooperative Center for Wellness (Thrive)

Thrive Cooperative Center for Wellness (Thrive) is Fairfield County's pioneering cancer survivorship organization, offering a warm, uplifting space where individuals impacted by cancer can find hope and healing. With a wide array of services designed to support people from diagnosis through treatment and beyond, Thrive's mission is to help everyone touched by cancer not just survive but truly thrive. SHU students play an integral role at Thrive, not only as members but also by volunteering at events, providing office support, and contributing through internships and work-study positions throughout the academic year.

Catholic Charities: Fresh Start Furniture Ministry

Nestled in the heart of Fairfield, **Fresh Start Furniture** is more than just an old school—it's a beacon of hope and a new foundation for individuals facing life's toughest challenges. Whether offering aid to those transitioning from homelessness, providing comfort to survivors of domestic violence, welcoming newcomers to the community, or aiding in recovery from natural disasters, Fresh Start Furniture ensure their doors and hearts are always open to those in need. Every Wednesday, SHU students join the space as "furniture guides," walking alongside clients through the warehouse and helping them choose household essentials that fit their needs and dreams. In addition, the Office of Community Engagement and Residential Life proudly partner with Fresh Start Furniture each year to collect and donate gently used items from the residence halls when students move out for the year.

Caroline House

In 1992, the School Sisters of Notre Dame founded **Caroline House** with a powerful mission: to empower immigrant women by giving them the knowledge and skills needed to transform their lives and the futures of their children. Since then, Caroline House has committed to empowering low-income immigrant women and children by providing essential education in English language and life skills, while breaking down the barriers of social and physical isolation. Women from all backgrounds join in this supportive space, forming a community that boosts their confidence and paves the way for empowerment. SHU students play a vital role in this mission by visiting Caroline House multiple times per week to support preschool and after-school programs, ensuring that both the mothers and children succeed in a nurturing learning environment.

Green Village Initiative

Green Village Initiative (GVI) is a nonprofit with a mission to cultivate food, knowledge, leadership, and community through urban gardening and farming, all in the pursuit of a more equitable food system in Bridgeport, CT. GVI's farms and gardens serve as the heart of a grassroots movement, empowering urban growers of all ages through a network of Community Gardens, the Reservoir Community Farm, and a Youth Leadership program that strengthens the Greater Bridgeport community. Throughout the year, members of the SHU community actively support GVI by helping maintain the gardens and processing harvests, which are later sold at the organization's Saturday Community Market.



EVENTS OF 2024-2025

SHU NATIONAL SUMMER SERVICE CHALLENGE (JUNE 1- AUGUST 15, 2024) The Office of Community Engagement completed the 4th annual SHU Summer Service Challenge which engaged over 210 students, faculty, staff, and alumni participants over 11 weeks (June 1-August 15, 2024). Together participants logged over 1,500 hours of community work for their local community. Participants explored themes like environmental justice, mental health awareness, food insecurity and youth empowerment and education, while having the opportunity to volunteer in Greater Bridgeport and their home communities.

COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS PRE-FALL PROGRAM (AUGUST 2024) The Office of Community Engagement hosted 30 first year participants, as well as 14 student leaders and 3 graduate assistants for the annual pre-fall Community Connections program during the week of August 17-22, 2024. Student volunteers served at various worksites throughout the City of Bridgeport. In partnership with SHU's Institute of Sustainability and Social Justice and the Pioneer Journey initiative, participants engaged in reflection each evening, discussing important social justice issues, including poverty, food insecurity, identity, power, and privilege.

VOLUNTEER FAIR (SEPTEMBER 2024) The Office of Community Engagement hosted its annual Volunteer & Work Study Fair on September 10 for over 30 nonprofit community partners to connect and recruit SHU student volunteers, work study students, and interns. The fair is one of the many opportunities available during SHU's 'First 50 Days' events, and its success continues to build long-term partnerships between Sacred Heart and the surrounding community.

SHU SHARES CAMPAIGNS (OCTOBER 2024 & FEBRUARY 2025) After its initial introduction in 2021, the Office of Community Engagement hosted its fourth annual SHU Shares Campaign. SHU Shares was founded to address and raise awareness about the food insecurity concerns of the Sacred Heart University community. The SHU Shares meal swipe donation drive raised 1072 swipes from 146 student participants for the student swipe bank to be distributed to students in need of additional financial support.

THANKSGIVING FOOD DRIVE (NOVEMBER 2024) The annual Thanksgiving Food Drive once again provided non-perishable food donations for Bridgeport community members, which were distributed at St. Charles Parish on November 26, 2024. OCE worked collaboratively with Student Government, Athletics, and SHU Dining to provide 500 turkeys and nonperishable food items for the community.

ADOPT-A-FAMILY (DECEMBER 2024) The Office of Community Engagement sponsored its annual holiday "Adopt a Family" fundraiser, in which the SHU community provided gifts and food for Christmas dinner to 50 families in Bridgeport. In addition, the Office of Community Engagement raised over \$2,540 and SHU Athletics contributed greatly to this initiative.

THE HUNGER PROJECT (MARCH 2025) The Office of Community Engagement co-sponsored the return of "The Hunger Project" along with SHU's Campus Ministry, First Year Programs, Graduate Student Life and the Phi Kappa Phi Honor Society. SHU volunteers raced to pack more than 20,000 meals for nOURish Bridgeport which were distributed to the community through their weekly food pantry. Students, faculty and staff enjoyed coming together for some friendly competition to support the end of food insecurity in Bridgeport.





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“Every penny that we raised goes directly to the association to raise awareness and funds for Alzheimer’s research, patient care and support,”

- Professor Rui Liu, Assistant Professor in the College of Health Professions

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THE OFFICE OF COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT IS CONSTANTLY WORKING TO STRENGTHEN TIES ACROSS CAMPUS, PARTICULARLY WITH DEPARTMENTS AND PROGRAMS THAT SHARE SIMILAR PASSIONS.

Walk To End Alzheimer’s- On October 19, OCE, in collaboration with the College of Health Professions and the Alzheimer’s Association, hosted the 3rd annual Walk to End Alzheimer’s event on campus. It was a record-breaking turnout with 413 registered student, employee and community participants who raised more than \$24,000 for advocacy and reach purposes for this disease. This exceeded our goal of \$15,000 by 62%.

The **Alzheimer's Association** sponsored Walk to End Alzheimer's event is hosted annually not only at SHU but in more than 600 neighborhoods around the country. It is the world's largest fundraiser to combat the disease.

SHU students, faculty, and staff, as well as their families and friends, were all encouraged to participate and donate to the cause. Members of various SHU clubs, organizations, programs, and athletic teams were among those who took part.

SERVICE-LEARNING AT SHU

Service-Learning Faculty Fellows Program The Office of Community Engagement hosted the service-learning faculty fellows program for the third year, which runs from September to May. The program assists a cohort of faculty members in developing new or transforming an existing course by integrating service-learning pedagogy.

Service-Learning Designated Courses Service-learning is a course-based experiential learning strategy that engages students in meaningful and relevant service with a community partner while employing ongoing reflection to draw connections between the service activity and course content. When implemented according to the standards of best practice, service-learning can enhance academic learning, promote civic responsiveness, and strengthen communities.

Pedagogy Support The Office of Community Engagement staff participated in and presented service-learning best practices and resources at the Equity at the Heart of Teaching symposium, hosted by the Center for Teaching and Learning on October 20, 2024.

Service-Learning Faculty Cohort 2024-2025



Kate O'Gara

Political
Science



Anna
Ramirez

Catholic Studies



Emily Mane

Chemistry



Rui Liu

Health
Science



Beth Koscinski

Marketing

STAFF CONTACT INFORMATION



OFFICE OF COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT Sacred Heart University

Interested in the Faculty Fellows Program, service-learning courses, department collaboration, SHU Shares and/or mentoring programs?

Contact Annie Johnson

Director

☎ 203-365-4833

✉ johnsona21@sacredheart.edu



Interested in our Global Service-Learning Programs, Pre-Fall Program, attending the Volunteer Fair, and/or helping out with the Thanksgiving Food Drive or Adopt a Family?

Contact Arlete Perez Paez

Assistant Director

203-396-8421 ☎

perezpaeza@sacredheart.edu ✉

Interested in the Pioneer Service Grant, Community Scholars, weekly volunteer opportunities, Community Partner collaboration/outreach or the Summer Service Challenge?

Contact Erin Rederscheid

Coordinator of Community Partnerships

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Sacred Heart University

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