



OFFICE OF COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT



ANNUAL REPORT

2025 - 2026



Dear Friends and Colleagues,

As another academic year comes to a close, we reflect with gratitude and pride on all that we have accomplished together through meaningful partnerships, transformative student experiences, and a shared commitment to the common good. The Office of Community Engagement (OCE) remains dedicated to connecting campus and community resources, deepening student learning through experiential opportunities, and inspiring civic responsibility in pursuit of a more just, inclusive, and equitable world. This year, SHU students, faculty, and staff collectively contributed more than 118,000 hours of community engagement in collaboration with our valued partners across education, healthcare, social services, faith communities, and nonprofit organizations.

Our global service-learning initiatives continue to provide students with opportunities to engage critically with issues of justice and sustainability through immersive international experiences. This year, we hosted our spring break global service-learning program in Costa Rica, where participants engaged in environmental justice projects including tree planting initiatives and building habitats for endangered tree frogs. We also hosted our third Global Service-Learning program to Greece, where students partnered with local NGOs focused on refugee support and advocacy. Across these experiences, students deepened their understanding of global citizenship, solidarity, and the importance of community-centered engagement.

Locally, more than 500 students participated in weekly volunteer opportunities and community-based work-study placements, contributing their time and talents to organizations throughout the region. In addition, our SHU Summer Service Challenge engaged over 150 participants who completed more than 1,100 hours of service between June and August, helping to strengthen community connections year-round.

This year also marked continued progress in our efforts to deepen relationships with community partners through listening sessions, collaborative programming, and recognition events designed to celebrate the impact of our shared work. We were also excited to welcome a new team member to the Office of Community Engagement. Andres Torres-Alvarez joined the team in October 2025 as Coordinator of Community Partnerships and has already become an invaluable bridge builder with both new and longstanding community partners. If you have not yet had the opportunity to connect with Andres, we encourage you to reach out.

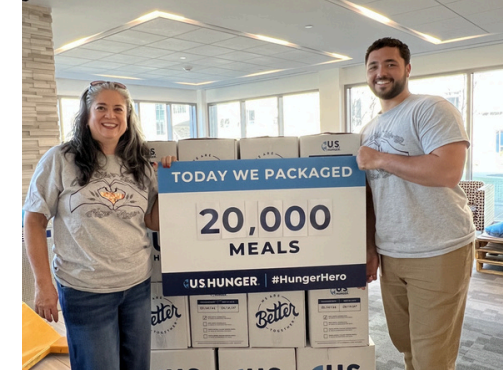
We are grateful for the trust, generosity, and partnership of the many organizations and individuals who make this work possible. Please explore this annual report to learn more about the growth of our programs, the impact of our students and partners, and the exciting opportunities ahead. Whether through a visit to our office, a phone call, or an email, we look forward to continuing this important work together.

With gratitude,

Annie Johnson, Director

Arlete Perez Paez, Assistant Director

Andres Torres-Alvarez, Coordinator of Community Partnerships



GRANTS & SCHOLARSHIPS

The Office of Community Engagement continues to support over 323 Pioneer Service Grant recipients, 30 Community Scholars, 31 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.

7,000
HOURS LOGGED

COMMUNITY SCHOLARS – The Community Scholars Grant is a service & financial aid-based grant available to upperclassmen that requires 60 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.

1,379.47
HOURS LOGGED

AVERAGE
WEEKLY **26**
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.

5,776

HOURS LOGGED

\$97,189

IN EMPLOYMENT FUNDS

MENTORING PROGRAMS

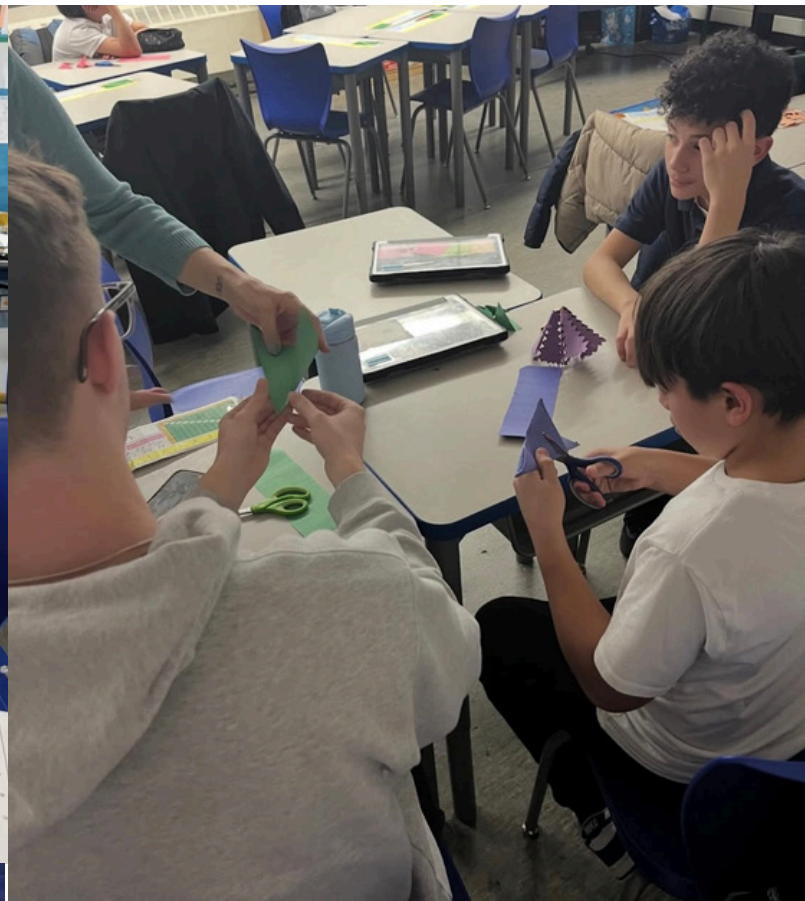
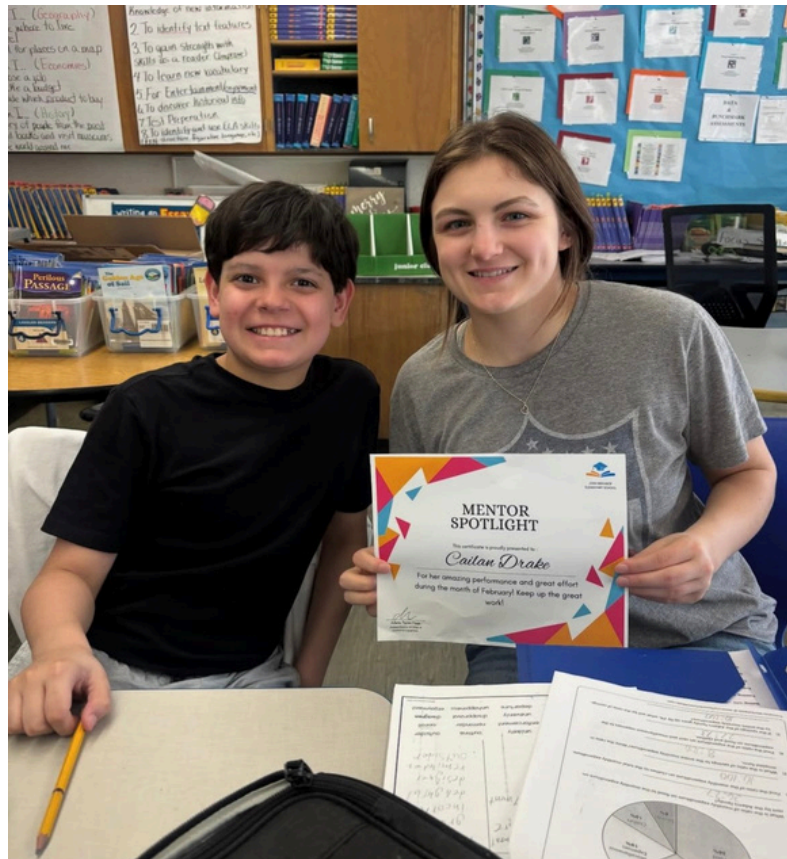
ACADEMIC MENTORING PROGRAM – The Office of Community Engagement celebrated the completion of its sixteenth year implementing the Academic Mentoring Program (AMP) at John Winthrop School. The program is financed by the Jones Zimmerman Foundation, which funds various trips and activities. The Community Engagement Office successfully applied for and received \$65,000 from the Marie and John Zimmerman fund for the 2025-2026 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 28 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 SHU Discovery Science Center, where they explored STEM exhibits, and cheered on the Pioneers at men's basketball and hockey home games. The program also collaborated with the SHU Virtual Reality lab, allowing participants to test out new technology.

"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, 2026, a total of 9 undergraduate students and two staff/faculty advisors participated in environmental justice programming over spring break, in partnership with Instituto Tecnológico de Costa Rica. Another cohort of eleven students and two advisors traveled to Athens, Greece in May to partner with Hellenic American University, refugee support and female empowerment initiatives.

COSTA RICA- Andres Torres-Alvarez (Coordinator of Community Partnerships) and Professor Anna Price (Public Health) traveled to Limon, Costa Rica in March with nine undergraduate students where they worked with local researchers on environmental projects like tree planting and building habitats for endangered species.

GREECE - Arlete Perez Paez (Community Engagement Assistant Director) and Professor Jonix Owino (Psychology) spent 10 days in Athens, Greece at the Hellenic American University with eleven undergraduate students offering a unique blend of community service and cultural immersion. Students were involved in refugee support and advocacy, as well as historical and archeological site visits.



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

Bridgeport Public Education Fund, Inc.

Bridgeport Public Education Fund, Inc. (BPEF) is a longstanding nonprofit organization dedicated to strengthening public education and expanding opportunities for students in Bridgeport. Through mentoring, college and career readiness support, community partnerships, and programs that uplift both students and educators, BPEF helps young people build the confidence and skills needed for success in school, work, and life. SHU students play a meaningful role in this mission by serving as mentors and volunteers, supporting local youth as they prepare for college, careers, and their futures.

Covenant School

Covenant School of Bridgeport is a tuition-free middle school that empowers boys from diverse backgrounds and families of limited economic means to grow academically, personally, and spiritually. With a rigorous and nurturing learning environment, Covenant School prepares students for future educational success while encouraging them to lead with humility, compassion, and a commitment to serving others. SHU students support Covenant School by engaging with students through volunteer service, mentoring, academic enrichment, and other opportunities that foster connection and growth.

East Side Senior Center

East Side Senior Center is a welcoming community space for older adults in Bridgeport, offering opportunities for socialization, recreation, wellness, education, and support. Through activities such as games, arts and crafts, meals, and other programs, the center helps seniors stay active, connected, and engaged in a friendly environment. SHU students contribute to the East Side Senior Center by volunteering their time, assisting with activities and events, and building meaningful intergenerational relationships with members throughout the year.

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 2025-2026

SHU NATIONAL SUMMER SERVICE CHALLENGE (JUNE 1- AUGUST 15, 2025) The Office of Community Engagement completed the **5th annual** SHU Summer Service Challenge which engaged over 175 students, faculty, staff, and alumni participants over 11 weeks (June 1-August 15, 2025). Together participants logged **over 1,100 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 2025) The Office of Community Engagement hosted 16 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, 2025. Student volunteers served at various worksites throughout the City of Bridgeport. Participants engaged in reflection each evening, discussing important social justice issues, including poverty, food insecurity, identity, power, and privilege.

VOLUNTEER FAIR (SEPTEMBER 2025) 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.

THANKSGIVING FOOD DRIVE (NOVEMBER 2025) 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, 2025. OCE worked collaboratively with Student Government, Athletics, and SHU Dining to provide **400 turkeys** and nonperishable food items for the community.

ADOPT-A-FAMILY (DECEMBER 2025) 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 **\$850** and SHU Athletics contributed greatly to this initiative.

THE HUNGER PROJECT (MARCH 2026) 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 18, OCE, in collaboration with the College of Health Professions and the Alzheimer's Association, hosted the **4th annual** Walk to End Alzheimer's event on campus. It was a record-breaking turnout with **more than 500** registered student, employee and community participants who raised more than **\$16,000** for advocacy and reach purposes for this disease.

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 Faculty Fellows Program The Office of Community Engagement hosted the fourth annual service-learning faculty fellows program, 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.

Service-Learning Faculty Cohort 2025-2026



Ximeng Chen
Political
Science &
Global Affairs



Analisa Gagnon
Sociology,
Criminology &
Criminal Justice



Shaun James
Psychology



Lauren Bryant
Psychology



Leigh Ronald
Physical
Therapy

STAFF CONTACT INFORMATION



OFFICE OF COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT Sacred Heart University

Interested in the SL Faculty Fellows Program, service-learning courses, department collaboration, pre-fall program and/or mentoring programs?

Contact Annie Johnson

Director

☎ 203-365-4833

✉ johnsona21@sacredheart.edu



Interested in our Global Service-Learning Programs, 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, or community partner collaboration/outreach?

Contact Andres Torres-Alvarez

Coordinator of Community Partnerships

☎ (203) 371-7841

✉ torresa23@sacredheart.edu





OFFICE OF
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Sacred Heart University

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