

**Northwoods Partners 2024 Annual Report**  
**Executive Director/ Caregiver Consultant Lisa Porthan**  
**Annual Report Data from January 1 to December 31<sup>st</sup> 2024**  
**Annual Fiscal Year January 1 2024-December 31<sup>st</sup> 2024**

**Mission Statement**

The mission of Northwoods Partners is to provide resources  
that promote independence and healthy aging

**Vision**

A community where people are able to age with dignity

**Values**

Compassion   Relationships  
Dignity         Respect  
Independence   Volunteerism

**Staff**

Lisa Porthan	Heidi Vanderbeek
Executive Director	
Caregiver Consultant	Care facilitator

**Board of Directors**

Kathy Neiman	Sheila Gruba	Evelyn Kuzma
Chris Braun	Marge Forsberg	Abby Sirek
Heather Fitzgerald	Walt Leino	Sid Thomson
Dick Flesvig	Dave Nichols	Mary Zupancich
Wendy Norcross	Caroline Owens	

**Volunteers and staff spent over 15,500 hours serving area seniors and caregivers from January 1 through December 31<sup>st</sup>, 2024.**

**Twenty-three board & committee members provided over 2,000 hours of volunteer service to Northwoods Partners.**

**Northwoods Partners recruited, trained, and coordinated ninety volunteers this year.**

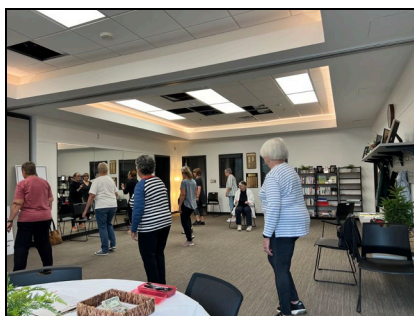
Of the ninety individuals who have enrolled in our volunteer program, seventy-three would be considered active volunteers in 2024. Volunteer coordination and time management are tracked through our Elderberry software system. Volunteers are trained and surveyed annually to get feedback and suggestions to improve their volunteer experience. Volunteers are recognized annually at a Volunteer Appreciation Dinner as well as at the November Appreciation Reception. Volunteers were recognized via social media, newspaper ads, handwritten letters of gratitude and an appreciation gift in 2024. We are ever so grateful to our volunteers for sharing their love, passion, dedication, selflessness, talents, and time with us and our area older adults. In 2024 Northwoods Partners volunteers provided fifteen thousand five hundred hours of service which equates to \$517,272 according to the Value of Volunteer Time report by the Do-Good Institute



## Transportation Program

Transportation is a large obstacle for seniors wishing to be independent. Without groceries, rides to medical appointments, or the ability to attend a local event, older adults are less likely to thrive and remain in their homes. In service of Northwoods Partners, our volunteers traveled over eighty thousand miles during 2024.

- Our **Local Transportation** program is a volunteer-supported program that provides rides to and from local services, including running errands such as shopping, banking, haircuts, and local medical appointments. Volunteers can also provide transportation to meetings, social events, and religious services. Five hundred and twenty local rides were provided to our area older adults in 2024.
- **Long-Distance Rides** are specifically provided for Medical Appointments. Using our network of volunteer drivers, we can help area older adults get to out-of-town medical appointments that are essential to maintaining their health and independence. This service is especially important in northern Minnesota, where residents must travel long distances to receive the specialty care they require. Volunteer drivers ensure that the older adult is safely escorted from their home to the appointment and back home again. Volunteer long-distance drivers are reimbursed by NP per mile driven and clients are asked to donate to NP to help us sustain our programs. This past year, Northwoods Partners volunteer long-distance drivers put on over forty thousand miles taking our area seniors to over four hundred out-of-town medical appointments.



## Exercise Programs

Northwoods Partners offers a variety of programs to help community members take a preventative approach to living well by offering a variety of exercise opportunities. In 2024, one hundred and sixty older adults participated in our exercise programs.

Northwoods Partners continues to work closely with the Arrowhead Well Care Network to integrate delivery networks of evidence-based programs through the creation of reliable pathways that connect healthcare providers, community organizations, public health and health plans. This includes being a part of the Juniper Network which connects individuals to programs that provide education, fitness instruction, and self-care strategies. These efforts have helped create a “well-care” culture which complements our mission.

- **Tai Ji Quan: Moving for Better Balance** is a research-based balance training regimen designed for older adults and people with balance disorders. TJQMBB is a 12-week progressive learning course where participants learn an adapted 8 form Tai Chi routine that is intended to address common and potentially debilitating movement and balance issues. A certified staff member and certified volunteer offered four twelve-week sessions that met twice a week to fifty participants. Classes are simulcast on-line via the Zoom platform for those who did not feel comfortable participating in a group setting. This evidence-based class improves muscle strength, flexibility, and balance.
- **New! Tai Ji Quan/ Weight training Combo class** was offered this fall for those who have completed the 12 week Tai Ji Quan, they can now do 30 minute routine and then spend 30 minutes with Functional Fitness weight trainer. Participants love this new option. It has been great to collobrate with the gym in our new building.
- **New! Chair Yoga** was added to our class offerings this fall and is taught by a certified Yoga instructor. This is a gentle form of exercise where you perform yoga stretches & postures. It has been a wonderful addition to our programs. Both classes are often at full capacity.
- **New! Stepping On** class is an evidence-based program for older adults with the goal of reducing the risk of falls. This course covers real life scenarios that adults encounter to help us think more about ways to reduce risks at home and in our daily lives.
- **SAIL** stands for Stay Active and Independent for Life! The SAIL exercise class is a strength, balance, and fitness program for community dwelling older adults that meets two times per week for one hour. Attendees perform exercises that improve strength, balance, and fitness to

stay active and reduce their chances of falling. The entire curriculum of activities in the SAIL program can help improve strength and balance. SAIL, this past year in Babbitt, had fifty-eight participants. An attendee shared that, “I have seen great changes in my body & balance by participating in this class.”

- Northwoods Partners **Community Exercise Group** continues to meet weekly; for one hour in a local church basement. In 2024, fifteen individuals participated. This class appeals to people interested in gathering with other individuals, in a group setting to increase physical activity, reduce falls and improve overall well-being. This group also provides a wonderful social opportunity as they meet before class for refreshments and conversation.

### **Social Engagement Opportunities/ Friendly Visitor Program**



Our friendly visit program connects individuals who may be homebound or living alone with volunteer visitors. This program helps reduce isolation and connects individuals with their community. Volunteers have spent over two thousand with thirty-six clients this year. Participants and volunteers share how wonderful it is to have new friends to share their life stories with as well as share their joys & struggles. Clients feel heard and cared for, which improves health and overall well-being.





- Northwoods Partners **Men's Memories and Movement** group continues to meet once a week at the Ely Area Community Hub/ NP program space. Up to sixteen individuals participate in this weekly gathering. This class provides a pleasant diversion and stimulates the mind as well as providing an opportunity to keep the body active. Those individuals experiencing MCI (Mild Cognitive Impairment) are also encouraged to attend. M & M provides a safe and supportive environment for all. The relationships formed in this group have provided support and social opportunities outside of class time. Including outdoor BBQ's, movies, and friendly visits at each other's homes as well supporting one another through illnesses and end of life journeys. We partnered with the American Legion Auxiliary to provide snacks for our group. Participants shared that this is the best part of their week.

**New! This fall we began a Women's memories & Movement group !**







## Tasty Tuesday Cooking Classes

Tasty Tuesday is held the third Tuesday of every month at Northwoods Partners Program room at the Ely Area Community Hub. Tasty Tuesday is a cooking class taught by an area chef, Northwoods Partners volunteers and sometimes guest chefs who share special recipes & techniques. The class is focused on providing healthy, cost-effective recipes. This class has been a big hit, often reaching maximum capacity. Participants enjoy taste testing and sharing some social time together as well. This summer Stephanie Hansen author of the True North Cabin Cookbook was a guest chef and share her cookbooks with us & some great tips for cooking for family gatherings in the north woods. Over Forty individuals have attended in 2024.



## **Northwood's Memory Care Program**

Northwoods Partners helps guide clients, caregivers and their families through the stages of Alzheimer's disease and other types of dementia by providing resources, referrals, and consultation to help reduce stress and increase family and community support. We also collaborate with other partners to make Ely and our Service Area a more dementia friendly environment. Our caregiver consultant has spent over seven hundred hours supporting caregivers, care receivers and their families dealing with dementia related issues. This year over seventy caregivers, care receivers and family members have benefited from participation in this program. Our Northwoods Memory Program provides the following support:

- A monthly caregiver support group and one-to-one consulting services. Our trained caregiver consultant uses evidence-based approaches to support family members and others who are caring for a loved one. Often this includes family meetings to help develop care plans, solve problems, and provide tools to help manage difficult behaviors.
- Social activities such as our Memories & Movement program; a variety of exercise programs; and companion care/friendly visitor to help reduce isolation.
- Resource library which offers a variety of literature and videos to share with caregivers, families, health care professionals, and volunteers for support and education.
- Caregiver Consultant is a trained REACH facilitator (Resources for Enhancing Alzheimer's Caregiver Health in the Community) providing assessments and intervention program.
- Activity kits for clients with dementia to help them engage and stimulate their minds and help reduce stress. These kits also provide the caregivers with resources and tools to build caregiver confidence and improve the caregivers' ability to cope. The creation of these kits fostered collaborations with local church groups, the community hospital, local wellness center and other community organizations who share a similar passion for this cause.

Northwoods Partners and Essentia share a common commitment to a coordinated, integrated partnership between primary care and community-based services for individuals with Alzheimer's disease and other dementia. We continue to implement a better continuity of care to improve the quality of life and care for these individuals and their caregivers. Through this collaboration we have created communication tools, built relationships, and improved service to allow for more effective and efficient communication flow between patients, providers, and community resources.

## Healthy Aging Expo

Our Annual Healthy Aging Expo is a daylong event dedicated to Senior Adults' Healthy Lifestyles, Education, and Caregiver Support. The expo is also a way for businesses and organizations to promote their resources and services which support seniors' healthy living and for families and patients living with Alzheimer's disease and dementia related disorders.

On May 30, 2024 over one hundred and twenty attendees heard from nine experts in their respective fields. During the 6-hour expo, experts like Angela Lunde, Program Coordinator for the Mayo Clinic Alzheimer's Disease Research Center: 'Preventing, Delaying & Treating Cognitive Decline, Molly Edwards Essentia Health clinic PA discussed Mental Health & Aging; Georgia Lane, ARDC shared info on Age-Friendly MN: Statewide Progress & Regional Impact, Kirsten Parendo from Justice North presented Legal Issues: Aging in Place, Ely Blommenson Community Hospital staff including Abby Sirek, Beth Hartshorne, Heidi Artisensi, Patti Banks and Jodi Martin gave presentations on Outpatient Infusion Therapies, Hot Health Care Topics and Chronic Medication & Correlation to Cardiopulmonary Rehab , Senior Linkage presented on Planning Ahead resource booklet.'

Participants come away with a renewed sense of self and are inspired to make healthier choices. They leave with the knowledge and tools to practice healthy habits daily to thrive, rather than just survive.





## **Caregiver Consulting Services/ Resource & Referral**

Northwoods Partners provides information, education, resource & referral, and coordination & training for caregivers, community members and health care providers.

- Website and Social media are used to keep information on programs and updated calendar of classes and events
- List of resources, brochures, Senior Reporter, St. Louis County caregiver guide and other informational booklets are distributed as needed.
- Collaborations with both local and county wide services provide an effective referral system including ROI (Release of Information) forms when necessary.
- Our Caregiver Consultant is a certified facilitator for Advanced Health Care Directives. At intake, NP clients are asked if they have a healthcare directive and if not, they are provided the forms and education about the importance of Health Care Directives.
- Caregiver Consultant is certified in Family Mediation and provides guidance through family meetings.
- A resource library is also provided with books, DVD's, games, puzzles, craft supplies, music, and other items to help engage care receivers and support caregivers.

### **Respite/ Hospice**

We continue to coordinate volunteer help for the person who cares for a chronically ill home-bound loved one. We continue to partner with Essentia Health Hospice & Palliative Care. This partnership includes referrals, brochure and flyers disbursement and volunteer recruitment as needed.

### **Who are we serving?**

Northwoods Partners clients include those individuals who are aged, and or chronically ill as well as caregivers and their families. Most of these clients are considered low income by the Federal Poverty guidelines for 2024. Our services are provided to individuals living within an area of approximately 480 square miles. This includes Ely, Winton, Babbitt, Tower, Soudan and surrounding townships.

In July of 2024, Northwoods moved into its new location at the Ely Area Community Hub. This move provided us with two office spaces as well as a 900 square foot program space. Now our programs can be housed in one location. It provides a warm & welcoming space for our older adults to gather, exercise, learn and receive support and resources as they age. Our new location will help support increased capacity and awareness of services. We will continue to grow our classes offerings as well as increase our intergenerational programming. We already have new collaborations with the Functional Fitness Gym on site and plan to partner with Happy Day's nursery school / daycare in 2025.

In September of 2024, we also hire a new staff person who is a certified Community Health Worker. She is a great addition to our team. Healthy aging is our mission, and our community is so supportive of our efforts. Together we will be an even healthier & happier community in 2025.

**Board of Directors in new building!**



**Intergenerational programs**



**Festival of Trees**

