



LEADING WITH INTENT





▲ L-R: Lynn Malerba, Maryam Elahi, Elena Trueworthy, and Catherine Marrior

COMMUNITY FOUNDATION
of EASTERN CONNECTICUT

SERVING 42 TOWNS
in New London, Windham and Tolland Counties

VISION
A healthy, thriving, sustainable Eastern
Connecticut with greater equity for all

MISSION
Collaborate with partners to put philanthropy into
action to address the needs, rights and interests
of our community in Eastern Connecticut

VALUES
Integrity, Equity, Respect, Courage, Empathy

CFECT.ORG

INVESTING in our community

2025 By the Numbers

Assets	\$ 148,279,030
Gifts	\$ 15,595,193
Grants	\$ 7,832,223
Scholarships	\$ 1,143,003

Grantmaking by Issue Area

- Basic Needs \$ 3,447,959
- Environment & Animal Welfare \$ 1,273,317
- Youth \$ 2,004,160
- Advocacy, Capacity Building, Designated, and Other \$ 1,106,787

“What you do makes a difference...
you have to decide what kind of
difference you want to make.”
—Jane Goodall

FOR MORE THAN FOUR DECADES, the Community Foundation of Eastern Connecticut has served as a funder, convener, and connector across our region. Through grantmaking, we help organizations access the resources they need to support families and strengthen communities. Through scholarships, we help students pursue their dreams and expand what’s possible for their futures. Through convenings and advocacy, we bring donors, community leaders and elected officials together to invest in informed decision-making.

We envision a Connecticut where all children can thrive, where working families have the support they need to succeed, where animals are safe and cared for, and where our natural resources are protected for generations to come. We know that creating lasting change requires more than passive giving. It requires intention, strategy and collective action.

This year, we continued to deepen our commitment to strategic philanthropy—pairing grantmaking with advocacy, coalition building, and community partnerships to achieve meaningful outcomes. Whether advancing access to early childhood education, supporting housing stability, investing in environmental stewardship, or strengthening basic needs services, we remained focused not only on responding to challenges, but on helping shape a stronger future for Eastern Connecticut.

This report serves as a reflection of the values we share and the impact we’ve made together.

With deep gratitude for your partnership, generosity, and belief in this work, we thank you for joining us in **leading with intent**.



Maryam Elahi, *President & CEO*



Catherine Marrion, *Board Chair*



◀ *Catherine Marrion,
Board Chair of the
Community Foundation
of Eastern Connecticut*

► *CFECT staff and Trustee
at the Legislature
(L-R: Lauren Lyons,
Jennifer O'Brien, Carol
Williams, Maryam Elahi,
Megan Brown)*

LEADING WITH PURPOSE: *Catherine Marrion's Commitment to Eastern Connecticut*

When asked how her legal career shaped her involvement with the Community Foundation of Eastern Connecticut, Catherine Marrion says it may have happened the other way around. "It was over dinner in 1982," she recalls, "while I was applying to law schools, that my father told me about a group of local residents working together to establish a permanent endowment to address community needs in southeastern Connecticut."

That group would go on to found the organization now known as the Community Foundation of Eastern Connecticut. Among them was Marrion's father, Robert W. Marrion, one of the Foundation's co-founders.

Watching those early conversations unfold left a lasting impression. "I saw how much they valued the unique skills and abilities that lawyers bring beyond simply knowing the law," Marrion says.

She went on to build a legal career focused in part on nonprofit and tax-exempt work before returning

to Connecticut and becoming involved with the Foundation herself. Since then, her involvement has grown from trustee to Vice Chair and now Board Chair.

In her current role, Marrion focuses on strengthening partnerships, supporting the Foundation's strategic priorities, and helping guide its advocacy efforts throughout the region. She credits visits with nonprofit partners as some of the most meaningful experiences of her time with the Foundation.

"It's incredibly motivating and fulfilling," she says, "to see firsthand the positive changes being made."

For Marrion, the work is deeply personal. "Eastern Connecticut is home," she says. "There is tremendous need here, but it can often be overlooked because there is also great wealth."

"What continues to motivate me most," she says, "is knowing we are making a meaningful difference throughout our community."



A STEP FORWARD—*With Work Ahead*

In 2025, the Foundation and its advocacy partners helped move child and family well-being higher on Connecticut's policy agenda.



The strongest result came in early childhood, where state leaders created the Early Childhood Education Endowment—a landmark long-term investment designed to expand access to care, reduce costs for families, and strengthen the early childhood workforce. The session also delivered targeted tax relief for some lower-income working families with children and additional support for K–12 and special education.

But, the work is not done. The broader refundable Child Tax Credit did not pass, universal school meals were not funded, and expanded just-cause eviction protections for families fell short again. These mixed results reinforced the importance of the Foundation's continued leadership through the **End Child Poverty Now** campaign, alongside its partners, as they work collectively to advance policies that make Connecticut more affordable, equitable, and child-centered.

Key Components of the Early Childhood Education Endowment (2025)

Up to \$300 million initial investment to expand access to care
Childcare costs capped at 7% of family income
No-cost care for families earning under \$100,000
Investments in early educator wages and program expansion

As Connecticut moves into the next budget cycle, continued investment will be critical to ensure the Early Childhood Education Endowment delivers on its promise for children, families, and the early childhood workforce.

A Community Response to Housing Instability



BUILDING A STATEWIDE APPROACH TO HOUSING

In Connecticut, the housing crisis is complex—and solving it requires more than isolated efforts. It requires coordination, shared strategy, and sustained investment across sectors.

In recent years, funders across the state have begun taking a more aligned approach through the Housing Affinity Group, convened by the Connecticut Council for Philanthropy. What began as a space to exchange information has evolved into a coordinated effort to better understand the housing landscape and identify opportunities for lasting change.

“It really started as just a conversation,” shares Becca Allen, Senior Program Officer at the Melville Charitable Trust, who co-led the Housing Affinity Group alongside Erika Frank, President of the Farmington Bank Community Foundation. “We were asking, is there a way we can coordinate our funding? Or at the very least, share what we’re all seeing on the ground?”

Over time, Allen, Frank, and other funders recognized a critical gap: despite years of investment in housing policy and advocacy, progress at the state level remained limited. “We had a very robust housing advocacy sector,” notes Frank, “but there was little movement at the legislature.”

That realization prompted funders to think collectively about how philanthropy could help build broader public support for housing solutions through community engagement, education, and local organizing. Funders shifted toward strategies focused on public understanding, local engagement, and community capacity-building.

To help advance this work, a group of funders, including the Community Foundation of Eastern Connecticut, co-invested in **Housing for All**, an initiative led by the Housing Collective. The effort strengthens resident-led groups in suburban and rural communities where support for housing solutions has historically been more limited.

This approach reflects a broader shift in philanthropy—from isolated grantmaking to coordinated investment in long-term change. Foundations across Connecticut are increasingly aligning resources and supporting strategies designed to strengthen communities and expand equitable housing opportunities.



- ◀ *Members of the Connecticut Tenants Union make their voices heard*
- ▶ *Project Hope Executive Director Avery Lenhart with Tom McNally, who started the Windham No Freeze Project in 2003*

A PATH TOWARD STABILITY

On any given night in Connecticut last year, more than 3,500 individuals experienced homelessness, with more than 20% living unsheltered in tents, cars, or outdoor encampments.

For many, homelessness is not the result of a singular obstacle, but a complex web of challenges that can include mental illness, domestic violence, addiction, poverty, or the inability to access basic resources.

“Just recently, we received a call from someone living in a tent,” explains Avery Lenhart, Executive Director of Project Hope. “We helped him obtain an ID so he could apply for work. Now he comes here each day to shower and do laundry.”

What began as a seasonal winter shelter has evolved into a year-round resource hub focused on helping individuals move toward long-term stability and permanent housing. In addition to emergency shelter, Project Hope provides outreach services, case management, computer access, showers, laundry facilities, and assistance navigating systems that often keep people trapped in homelessness.

“People often think housing stability is just about paying rent,” says Lenhart. “But without a birth certificate or

state ID, someone can’t apply for housing, secure employment, or even access benefits. These barriers prevent people from becoming ‘lease-ready’ or ‘job-ready’ in the eyes of landlords and employers.”

With support from the state and the Community Foundation of Eastern Connecticut, Project Hope has expanded both its workforce and services. Today, the organization operates from a renovated facility in Willimantic that includes shelter rooms, ADA-compliant spaces, and common areas for crisis situations. Staff conduct outreach in the community and work directly with landlords to prevent evictions and support successful housing placements.

Looking ahead, Project Hope plans to expand further by adding on-site clinical support and developing transitional housing paired with education around budgeting, tenancy, and independent living skills.

Youth-Led Environmental Resilience



EMPOWERING TOMORROW'S ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDS

Young people concerned about climate change now have a meaningful way to turn concern into action—and they're learning important skills in the process.

Interns with The Active Voice (TAV) have been at the State Capitol meeting with legislators, submitting testimony, appearing before committees, and writing articles. "The despair our young people feel over climate change is real and justified," says Christine Palm, founder of TAV. "But members of Gen Z are also resilient, and during this pilot year of The Active Voice, we saw how dramatically—even joyfully—they responded when their voices were heard in the halls of power."

Launched with seed funding from the Foundation, TAV engaged 14 interns from three educational institutions in its inaugural year, helping students move beyond concern into meaningful civic engagement. In addition to legislative advocacy, interns gained journalistic experience by writing published pieces for CT News Junkie.

Palm, a former state representative and vice chair of the Environment Committee, launched TAV after helping

advance climate change education legislation in Connecticut public schools in 2022.

Her goal was to create a program that gives students direct access to lawmakers, advocates, lobbyists, and policy analysts. Through this work, "civics moves from the theoretical to the practical," says Palm. "Government can feel unattainable to young people, but this program shows them their voices can and should be heard."

That connection has already left a strong impression on participants. Intern Dene Whitaker from ECSU says, "My generation is speaking up, pushing back, and creating real change. Testifying on bills has restored a sense of purpose I thought I'd lost, reminding me my voice truly matters."

Palm says one of the most memorable moments came during an early icebreaker activity in which interns described their feelings about climate change with words like "small," "angry," and "disenfranchised." Just weeks later, students returned to the exercise using words such as "hopeful," "determined," and "in it together."



- ◀ TAV interns with Third Act and Legislators
- ▶ Students with herpetologist Jeff Cavallaro (Quinn Ecological) learning how to conduct a vernal pool assessment. Vernal pools are where frogs and salamanders lay their eggs
- ▶▶ Students watch song sparrows eat berries

OPENING DOORS TO ENVIRONMENTAL CAREERS

When Diba Khan-Bureau began teaching 25 years ago, creating opportunities for her students to gain hands-on environmental experience was a challenge.

"These are nontraditional students," says Khan-Bureau. "They're often the first in their families to attend college. They have bills to pay, and many have families to take care of."

Over the past several years, funding from the Foundation has helped change that reality for students at CT State Community College - Three Rivers Campus. Through paid internships and experiential learning opportunities, students have gained real-world experience in fields including water quality monitoring, bird conservation, and invasive species management.

Khan-Bureau points to partnerships with organizations including CT Audubon Society, Save the Sound, and Avalonia Land Conservancy as transformative opportunities for students to connect with the outdoors and envision environmental work as a viable career path.

"This funding has opened so many doors for students," Khan-Bureau explains. In the past, many students could

not afford to participate in unpaid internships due to work schedules and personal responsibilities. Now, with paid internships, students can get actual fieldwork experience.

The impact has been lasting. Former students have gone on to careers with organizations including the CT Department of Energy and Environmental Protection, CT Audubon Society, and the United States Geological Survey.

Students are also engaging in projects that directly benefit the local community and environment, including maintaining pollinator and vegetable gardens on campus. Produce grown in the vegetable garden is donated to a soup kitchen in Norwich, where fresh food is often in short supply.

"Not only are they gaining confidence," Khan-Bureau says of her students, "but they're also making a positive impact on their communities through education and outreach."



BUILDING CONNECTIONS FOR NEW NONPROFIT LEADERS

Strong leadership is essential to a thriving nonprofit sector, but stepping into a leadership role can also feel isolating, especially for first-time Executive Directors (EDs).

Recognizing a wave of leadership transitions across the region—with more than a dozen new EDs hired in a single year—the Community Foundation of Eastern Connecticut launched an initiative in mid-2025 designed to support new nonprofit leaders.

The cohort aims to strengthen organizational capacity while fostering deeper peer connections across the nonprofit community. Leaders from organizations spanning the Foundation's priority areas come together regularly to share experiences, discuss common challenges, and explore strategies to strengthen both their organizations and leadership skills.

"We wanted to create a safe and supportive setting where nonprofit leaders could not only learn from one another, but also connect with issue area experts," said Maryam Elahi, President and CEO of the Foundation.

Facilitated by Jennifer O'Brien, Program Director at the Foundation, the cohort explores key areas of nonprofit effectiveness including fundraising, board development,

communications and marketing, and navigating the increasingly complex health insurance landscape. The gatherings also create space for candid conversations around the day-to-day realities of nonprofit leadership.

"The New ED meetings have been incredibly valuable as I continue growing in my role," says Michael Vaz, ED of Thames River Community Service. "There's a strong sense of support, collaboration, and shared learning."

Katherine Hannah, CEO of Covenant Shelter New London, says the cohort provides both practical guidance and a sense of community. "Leading a smaller nonprofit often means wearing many hats, and this group has provided both community and practical support from others who truly understand the role," she shares.

As the cohort continues to meet, the Foundation hopes the initiative will further strengthen leadership capacity and deepen connections across Eastern Connecticut's nonprofit sector.



- ◀ *Nonprofit executive directors gather in New London to discuss organizational challenges and successes*
- ▶ *Youth nature lesson*

A LASTING LEGACY: *Giving That Endures*

At the Community Foundation of Eastern Connecticut, planned gifts ensure that the causes people care about continue to be supported for generations to come.

Often made through wills, estates, or retirement assets, these gifts become part of a permanent commitment to the region, creating impact that extends beyond a lifetime.

Many individuals who leave legacy gifts are also long-time supporters during their lifetimes—people who have consistently invested in their communities through annual giving, volunteerism, and civic engagement. Planned giving becomes a natural extension of those deeply held values and commitments.

For many donors, that commitment is grounded in both professional achievement and personal values—and **Laurie Chipperfield**'s bequest is no exception. A lifelong Stonington resident, Chipperfield built a distinguished career at Pfizer while remaining deeply connected to her community through volunteer service with organizations including Habitat for Humanity of Eastern Connecticut, the Pawcatuck Neighborhood Center, and the Community Foundation.

When Chipperfield passed away in 2024, she left a generous bequest to the Community Foundation, extending her commitment to community well into the future. Her legacy now lives on through the Foundation's support of nonprofits and initiatives that strengthen Eastern Connecticut.

Other recently established bequests support causes ranging from environmental conservation to animal welfare to LGBTQ+ advocacy through organizations including the Connecticut Horticultural Society, Denison Pequotsepos Nature Center, and Alliance for Living.

Legacy gifts can be as simple as naming the Community Foundation in your will or may involve incorporating multiple assets into your philanthropic plans.

Whether your ideas are straightforward or more complex, our Development team is available for a confidential, no-obligation conversation about creating a legacy plan that reflects your values.



THE LEGACY SOCIETY: *Giving That Lives On*

Through bequests, charitable trusts, gift annuities, retirement plans, or life insurance, Legacy Society members plan to make gifts to causes important to them after their lifetimes. We are deeply grateful to every member of the Legacy Society for the care and compassion they put into action through their future gifts.

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 Mary Jean Agostini
 Pam Akins & Barry Levinson
 Claire & Anthony Alessi
 Jay Allen
 Judith Anderson
 Lauren Anderson
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 Francene & Daniel Blackmore
 Siegmur Blamberg
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 Wayne Boettner
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 Beth & Garon* Camassar
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 Cynthia & George Willauer
 Amy Willcox & Del Knight
 Carol Williams & Robert Asher
 Cathy Zall

* Deceased

▲ L-R: Lee-Ann Gomes, CFECT Trustee with Dina Sears-Graves, President, and Scott Umbel, Vice President, of United Way of Southeastern Connecticut

DONORS: *Turning Generosity Into Impact*

In 2025, the Community Foundation received over 1,000 donations from individuals and organizations who gave more than \$15.4 million in support of causes that matter to them and to the well-being of Eastern Connecticut residents. We are so grateful for their generosity.

\$1,000,000 and above

Anonymous (1)
Estate of Laurie Chipperfield

\$500,000-\$999,999

Anonymous (3)
Alva Greenberg
Estate of Terrance Holbrook

\$100,000-\$499,999

Anonymous (3)
Dalio Philanthropies
Edward & Mary Lord Foundation
New London Area Food Pantry

\$25,000-\$99,999

Anonymous (3)
Bank of America Private Bank
Ruth Buczynski/The National Institute for
the Clinical Application of Behavioral
Medicine
Colchester Land Trust
Connecticut Early Music Society
Leslie Curtis
Janet & Roland DePratti
Maryam Elahi
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Kitchings Family Foundation
Lin & Waldo Klein
Mary & John LaMattina
Kathleen & David MacLennan
Pam & Frank Maletz
Martin House
Pfizer
Candace* & Thomas Sanford

\$10,000-\$24,999

Anonymous (3)
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Anonymous (2)
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L-R: Vanessa Daye, Community Conservation Coordinator; Amy Blaymore Paterson, Executive Director; CT Land Conservation Council

\$2,500-\$4,999

David Benvenuti
Wayne Boettner
Rory Contin & John Malmros
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Nancy Hileman
The Last Green Valley
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Norwich Public Schools Education
Foundation
Portuguese Holy Ghost Society
Maura & Mark Powers
Barbara Biggs Scripps
& Sebastian Scripps
Joseph St. Martin
Take Note!
Evelyn Thavenet
The Whaler's Inn

\$1,000-\$2,499

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Black Point Beach Club Association
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\$500-\$999

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We are deeply grateful for all gifts!
Due to space constraints, you can
find 2025 gifts of under \$500 at
cfect.org/CurrentDonors.



- ▲ *CFECT Trustees Karim Ismaili and Carol Williams with Merrill Gay, Executive Director of the CT Early Childhood Alliance.*
- ▼ *CFECT Trustee Nick Fortson with Dan O'Shea*

NEW FUNDS: *Expanding Opportunities for Impact*

Designated

- Anonymous (1)
- Barbara Long Fund for Nursing
- Richard and Debra Willner Fund

Field of Interest

- Carol Wojtkun Fund
- Grammys Hope Fund
- Janet Labrecque Fund
- Khurshed C. Rastomji Fund
- Love our Libraries
- Wenck Family Fund

Scholarship

- Cmdr. Kenneth Robert Kee, USN Scholarship Fund
- Karen Jackson Memorial Scholarship Fund
- Mary Beth Baker Memorial Scholarship for Historical Pursuits
- The Ann Marie Pasquin Memorial Scholarship Fund

Donor Advised

- Anonymous (1)
- Cynthia Willauer Fund
- The National Institute for the Clinical Application of Behavioral Medicine Scholarship

Nonprofit Organization Endowment

- Martin House Endowment Fund
- New London Area Food Pantry
- Stonington Garden Club Fund





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