

**Northwoods Partners 2023 Annual Report**  
**Executive Director/ Caregiver Consultant Lisa Porthan**  
**Annual Report Data from January 1 to December 31<sup>st</sup> 2023**  
**Annual Fiscal Year January 1 2023-December 31<sup>st</sup> 2023**

**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         | Candy Schindele    |
| Executive Director   | Operations Manager |
| Caregiver Consultant | Program Manager    |

**Board of Directors**

|                    |                |                |
|--------------------|----------------|----------------|
| Rae Bentz          | Sheila Gruba   | Pat Rolando    |
| Chris Braun        | Craig Haberman | Abby Sirek     |
| Heather Fitzgerald | Walt Leino     | Sid Thomson    |
| Dick Flesvig       | Dave Nichols   | Mary Zupancich |
|                    | Caroline Owens |                |



**Volunteers and staff spent 15,256 hours serving area seniors and caregivers from January 1 through December 31<sup>st</sup> 2023.**

**Twenty-three board & committee members provided 1,722 hours of volunteer service to Northwoods Partners.**

**Northwoods Partners recruited, trained and coordinated eighty-seven volunteers this year.**

Of the eighty-seven individuals who have enrolled in our volunteer program, seventy-five would be considered active volunteers in 2023. 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, hand written letters of gratitude

and an appreciation gift in 2023. 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 2023 Northwoods Partners volunteers provided fifteen thousand, two hundred and fifty-six hours of service which equates to \$485,155 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. Northwoods Partners clients received three-hundred and fifty-six grocery deliveries in 2023. In service of Northwoods Partners, our volunteers traveled eighty-three thousand, one hundred and nineteen miles during 2023.



- 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 forty-eight local rides were provided to our area older adults in 2023.
- **Long-Distance Rides** are specifically provided for Medical Appointments. Using our network of volunteer drivers, we are able to 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 make a donation to NP to help us sustain our programs. This past year, Northwoods Partners volunteer long-distance drivers put on forty-one thousand, seven hundred and fifty-five miles taking our area seniors to five hundred and eighty-eight 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 2023, one hundred and forty-two older adults participated in our exercise programs.

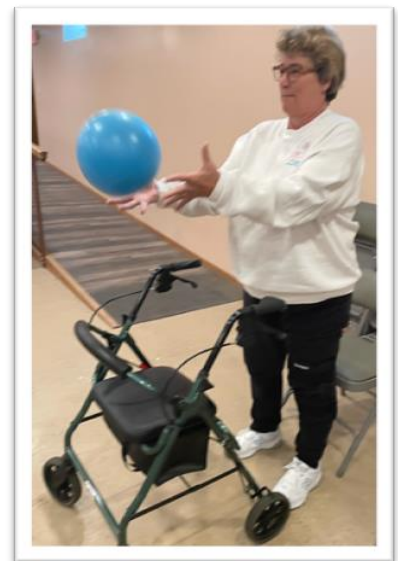
Northwoods Partners continues to work closely with the Arrowhead Well Care Network to integrate delivery networks of evidence-based programs through the creation of reliable pathways that connect healthcare providers, community organizations, public health and



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 six twelve-week sessions that met twice a week to sixty 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. A recent participant stated, “It has improved my balance, posture, and overall sense of bodily awareness. It is a gentle form of exercise that has touched me physically, mentally, and spiritually. Tai Ji Quan is a gift.” Our TJQMBB program has been recognized by the Juniper Network as an outstanding program repeatedly and one of our participants was recently highlighted on the Juniper website Participant Stories: <https://yourjuniper.org/participant-stories/life-begins-again-for-tai-ji-quan-class-participant/>.

- **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-nine participants. An attendee shared that, “I have strengthened my upper body, strengthened my core, and improved my flexibility.”



- Northwoods Partners’ **Exercise Buddy** program matches volunteers to assist clients with a tailored exercise program they do in their homes. This program also helps increase their strength, flexibility and balance. The staff and volunteers provided two hundred and forty-five sessions with individuals this year.

- Northwoods Partners **Community Exercise Group** continues to meet weekly; for one hour in a local church basement. In 2023, fifteen individuals participated. This class appeals to persons 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.

- Northwoods Partners **Men’s Memories and Movement** group continues to meet once a week at the Ely Senior Center. Up to sixteen individuals participate in this weekly gathering. This class provides a pleasant diversion and stimulates the mind as well as provides 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 form in this group have provided support and social opportunities outside of class time. Including outdoor BBQ's, movies, and friendly visits at each other homes as well supporting one another through illnesses and end of life journeys. This year we partnered with the American Legion Auxiliary to provide snacks for our group. Also, this year the veterans in our group were recognized by the Heart of the Woods Quilters with quilts of valor. Participants have shared that they look forward to this day every week.



### **Friendly Visits 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 three thousand, two hundred and forty hours with thirty-two 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 over all well-being.

### **Tasty Tuesday**

Held the third Tuesday of every month at the Ely Senior Center, Tasty Tuesday is a cooking class taught by an area chef and Northwoods Partners volunteer. The class is focused on providing healthy, cost-effective recipes. Forty-two individuals have attended these classes and give it rave reviews like, "I've been so envious of my friends in Minneapolis that attend cooking classes, now I can too."



### **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 six hundred and sixty-three hours supporting caregivers, care receivers and their families dealing with dementia related issues. This year over seventy-eight 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 as 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 dementias. We continue to work on implementing 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 22, 2023 over one hundred and fifty attendees heard from eight experts in their respective fields. During the 6-hour expo, experts like Nick Rethemeier, Program Coordinator for the Mayo Clinic Alzheimer’s Disease Research Center: ‘Your Aging Brain, What is Normal?’, Dr Crystal Chopp, DDS, Owner and Dentist, Ely Family Dental: ‘You’ve Got Something to Smile About’, Dr Erin Bremner, OD, Owner and Optometrist, Ely Vision Center: ‘Vision and Aging’, Gretta Jenkins, Assistive Tech Specialist, Lighthouse Center for Vital Living: ‘Technology & Devices for Healthy Aging’, Dr Joe Schwinghamer, Family Practice Physician, Essentia Health Ely Clinic: ‘Getting Your Affairs in Order’, Sara Rohr, MSW, LICSW, Clinical Manager Range Mental Health: ‘Mental Health as We Age’, Greg Jonas, RN, Nursing Services Manager, Ely-Bloomenson Community Hospital: ‘EBCH Transitional Care Program’, Jodi Martin, Marketing & Communications Team Leader, EBCH: ‘EBCH Services Overview’.

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 on a daily basis 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
- Monthly calendar listing activities, resources and food access is distributed to over 3000 households through distribution in a local paper
- 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 provided guidance through family meetings.

## 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. The majority of these clients are considered low income by the Federal Poverty guidelines for 2023. 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.



## Vision for 2024

As we look towards the future, we are excited on what lies ahead for Northwoods Partners. In 2024, we will be moving our offices and programs to the Ely Regional Community Complex which will provide us a great opportunity to better serve our aging population. We will have 900+ sq ft program space where seniors can participate in activities that will increase their physical activity, reduce isolation and provide education on healthy lifestyles and caregiver support. This space will be ideal for intergenerational programming and a variety of community events. Collaborations with the Functional Fitness gym and daycare on site will complement our programming. We will continue to strive to promote healthy aging and provide our community a place where they can age with dignity.

