

Volunteer Newsletter

August 2022



A note from Robin Haynes Volunteer Coordinator

Aroostook Volunteer Support Meeting

I have had the honor to host our Volunteer Coordinator meeting here in Aroostook County at the Aroostook House of Comfort (AHOC). Ali Maguire, S. Portland VC and Sarah Cote, Bangor VC traveled several miles to make the trek north to attend our first in person meeting since the pandemic began. We have had several meetings virtually, but to have the opportunity to sit around a table together, in the same room, to work, brainstorm and laugh was rejuvenating. When Ali and Sarah arrived, I was asked what the plants were, that look like little shrubs, growing in the fields. Truthfully, at first, I wasn't sure what they were referring to. I was trying to imagine shrubs growing in a field. What they were inquiring about was the potato fields. As I drove home that evening, I took the time to really look at the fields I so take for granted. Admiring the neatly farmed blocks of land that hold so much variety in the different colors of green and petite potato blossoms. This was Sarah and Ali's first visit to AHOC. Both have heard me, and several other team members, talk about the House of Comfort, but while giving them a tour, sharing some history, and answering their questions; I got to see "the house" through their eyes and it warmed my heart. What is the Aroostook House of Comfort? The Aroostook House of Comfort is an in-patient hospice and respite care facility owned by the Aroostook Hospice Foundation and staffed by Northern Light Home Care & Hospice, the only local Medicare-certified hospice provider in the area. Together we offer individuals and their families compassionate care, comfort, dignity, and support on their journey through hospice. We have been privileged to care for hospice patients throughout Aroostook County and have also had the honor of caring for a few Northern Light Home Care & Hospice patients from our southern areas of Bangor, Waterville, and Ellsworth areas. The Aroostook House of Comfort is intended to be a comforting place for patients and family members. Great effort and care has deliberately been done to provide a place that the hospice philosophy of care is always the driving force, and that patients and their loved ones will be surrounded by caring and compassionate team members in a place that feels like "home." Sarah and Ali have shared with me about their visit to AHOC and their words have moved me, and I hope they do the same for you also.



A note from Sara Cote Volunteer Coordinator

A Visit to the Aroostook House of Comfort (AHOC)

For over a year and a half I've heard small and large detail of the Aroostook House of Comfort. From brief anecdote to the occasion that one of our area patients travels north for a stay. Getting a chance to meet the place was such a pleasure and re-affirmed both the potential for peace and beauty within end-of-life and the joyful time the coordinators get to share with one another for our quarterly (ish) in-person meeting.

What struck me during the tour that Robin led Ali and I on was how much of a communal project AHOC is. All parts of it were crafted with such intention and care. It seems the community came together to make a deliberate hearth, abundant in warmth and acknowledgement of the sacred place it asked to become. For how difficult end-of-life can be, AHOC clearly aimed to be an element of ease, perhaps to 'hold a calm space' for its dear guests and family caregivers.

Outside was as peaceful as in. Some of the grounds felt like a zen garden with the opportunity to wonder and behold the beauty of nature. A large, acoustic structure – the Gazebo – open to the warm breeze, with views of the mountains – echoed as we spoke, our voices disappearing into dynamic green grasses and trees.

We met all day Thursday, finalizing a plan for much of the next several months, with action steps and notes and decisions about what to let go of, update or scrap based on feedback we've gotten from our collective volunteer groups. It's funny with all the things we accomplished, and the sheer distance we traveled (Ali faced the brunt of the mileage having journeyed all the way from South Portland!) – it was *simply* lovely visit. It was somehow energizing, refreshing. For how intimate the grounds and house were, everything simultaneously felt wide-open, spacious, allowing for freedom and gentleness – just a few things that allow for people to be themselves in a place of grieving, respite, and care



A note from Ali Maguire Volunteer Coordinator

658 miles, there and back.

Aroostook House of Comfort (AHOC) is an easy drive from South Portland, albeit a long one. The trip was worth its weight with every passing mile. As with all of us in this era of Covid, meetings have been handled through video conferencing or target specific emails and though informative are cliché and accurately categorized as “making the best out of a less than ideal situation”; In contrast, our Volunteer Coordinator in-person meeting was invigorating and restorative.

Presque Isle greets you as you pass into its borders with rich, leafy, green vegetation hovering over acres of well sown fields harboring potato crops that will be harvested at about the time the nights turn crisp and the trees advance to autumn hues. Within minutes of the 300+ mile journey you feel the stress of driving fall away and replaced with a sense of having arrived someplace special. Contentment fills your inner being.

If entering the community of Presque Isle was welcoming then the reception upon arriving at AHOC was warmth, peace, and serenity. If you have ever experienced being a guest while simultaneously feeling instantly at home then you understand the richness of environment and soothing atmosphere The House of Comfort provides.

Without stealing Robin’s gift for describing AHOC there is an impressiveness to which she can articulate the thought, planning, and execution of every finite detail of the facility, whether it be the hanging of the stained-glass windows in the chapel, the acoustics in the gazebo, the flowering shrubs and perennials planted outside each of the six patient windows, or the Remembrance Walk with granite benches and stones engraved with the names of guests whose lives have closed their circle within the property confines- a tree stands protectively in the middle offering shade and contrast between what is living and not- the juxtaposition; granite to fauna heightens your senses and invites you to reflect on what has passed and the love you continue to hold in your heart. The expansive and lush property is manicured and maintained by volunteers, the building designed and constructed through gifts of materials, craftsmanship, and artistry displayed with expansive windows, cathedral ceilings, an oversized stone fireplace; patient rooms are designed to be intimate while also allowing enough room for guests to be present. Every nuance is deliberate. Though the Aroostook House of Comfort is designed for respite in the Hospice environment it feels as much a retreat. Good for the soul.

Our volunteer coordinator meeting was a productive one and I believe more so in the presence of such a tranquil and inspiring amenity. The trip to AHOC was initiated to collaborate and align our volunteer programs and we are well on our way. On paper and in execution work was accomplished as this was a constructive endeavor; yet upon leaving and saying farewell to Robin and Sarah, I also depart not feeling as though it was a business affair but rather one in which I return home renewed.

Offerings and Outreach:

The Aroostook House of Comfort has graciously shared hand-crocheted and fleece-tied blankets to be given to our patients. Please see any one of the Volunteer Coordinators to pick one out that you think your patient might like. There are several fleece-tied options for children as well.



Aroostook County Volunteer Support Meeting

Monday, August 8

6:30-7:30PM

Via MS Teams