



## AHEC Scholars Community Engagement and Service

Updated January 2026

This 80-hour program is an **AHEC Scholars eligible activity**. It consists of 40 hours of didactic activities and 40 hours of field/community-based activities. Larner medical students may participate in the program in their second, third or fourth year at LCOM. This is a selective application process. A limited number of students are selected based on the volunteer needs of the partnering community agencies, as well as program capacity and strength of the student application. General program and application questions can be directed to: Patti Smith Urie, Outreach Professional, AHEC Scholars. [Patti.smith-urie@med.uvm.edu](mailto:Patti.smith-urie@med.uvm.edu) Service program oversight and agreements are supported by AHEC Faculty: Anne Morris, MD, Mark Pasanen, MD and Kathy Mariani, MPH, MD. The program is guided by these statements from the American College of Physicians.

### **Obligations of the Physician to Society**

*“Physicians should help the community and policymakers recognize and address the causes and social and environmental determinants of health, disease, and disability, including human rights concerns, discrimination, poverty, and violence. They should work toward ensuring access to health care for all persons; act to eliminate discrimination in health care; and help correct deficiencies in the availability, accessibility, and quality of health services, including mental health services, in the community.*

*Physicians should also explore how their own knowledge, beliefs, and attitudes influence their ability to fulfill these obligations.”*

### **Cultural Humility and Volunteerism**

*“Physicians should provide culturally sensitive care. Efficacy in this domain is enhanced by cultural humility, which emphasizes physician self-awareness, reflection, and a relationship centered approach to each patient.*

*Continuity and sustainability should guide the volunteer physician in working with the community, local physicians, and the health system to understand the health needs of the community and help prioritize them in cultural and economic context to achieve a lasting benefit, with an understanding of short- and long-term impact. The outcomes should be desired by and the interventions acceptable to the affected population.”*

**American College of Physicians Ethics Manual** |

## **Objectives**

The broad goals of this AHEC Scholars activity are to support student understanding of volunteerism and to support meaningful service to community agencies. Additionally, this initiative aims to provide student exposure to health care topics and societal issues from different viewpoints and perspectives and to step outside the classroom. Course content and activities include exploration of Vermont systems and services related to promoting and maintaining health through direct experiences with community-based organizations and other stakeholders. Service activities may be directly or indirectly related to health and medicine. Students will learn ways physicians can partner with community groups and other professions to address issues of availability, accessibility, and quality of health services in the community. Through service, students

will enhance partnerships with community agencies to further goals agreed upon by the community partner, AHEC and the student volunteer. The concepts, efforts, and structure of this service opportunity are designed to strengthen “collective impact”.

Through participation in this program, students will be able to:

1. Discuss the benefits and responsibilities of medical professionals as volunteers within the communities they serve.
2. Discuss the responsibility of physicians to understand and address health disparities, community context, and social drivers of health. (AHEC focus area: social determinants of health)
3. Recognize the value of different expertise and perspectives for health promotion and community benefit. (AHEC focus area: interdisciplinary practice and teamwork)
4. Identify ways that community agencies address the unique cultural, language, and health literacy factors affecting the staff, volunteers and community members. (AHEC focus area: cultural responsiveness)
5. Evaluate how their personal service motivations and constraints align with a community organization’s needs (e.g. short-term vs longitudinal service, long range vs short range initiatives, time commitment required).

## Learning Activities

**40 Didactic Hours** Students complete a core asynchronous training combined with Vermont-focused materials and other learning opportunities. A program orientation session and materials cover principles of community engagement and responsibilities and ethics in volunteer service. Other required didactics include a series of on-line modules from the American College of Physicians (ACP) and assigned readings, videos, films and activities, with reflection activities to make connections between training content and field activities. The ACP modules, *Caring with Compassion*, can be found here: [Caring with Compassion](#). The core 20 hours are required for all participants. The remaining 20 hours are chosen by the student, with options for live training, conferences, or events that relate to student interests, field hours, or future career plans. Examples include AHEC Scholars events, select AHEC Spotlight Series events, the UVM Health Equity Summit, New England Rural Health Conference, advocacy training at the Vermont State House, and other meetings, training, or events that pertain to course content and/or field activities. Students record didactic hours on a provided log.

**40 Field Hours** Field hours are completed in volunteer service options approved by AHEC. The community agencies are located in Vermont and the field hours require in-person participation. After reading about the agencies and their needs, students should consider schedules, workload, and availability prior to applying and determine if a meeting would be helpful to discuss these details to ensure a good fit. Prior to starting the program, a documented agreement is established to ensure all parties have a common understanding of the community agency’s goals, the service activities the student will complete, and the timeframe for program completion. Students record field hours on a provided log.

**Reflection** Included in the 40 didactic hours, students reflect on connections between the course materials, field activities, and AHEC Scholars priority areas by responding to prompts on an on-line discussion board. When feasible, participating students may opt for periodic in-person or virtual (zoom) discussions rather than written posts to a discussion board. Additional requirements include a one-two page written reflection and an electronic survey.

## AHEC Scholars Core Topic Areas

The AHEC Scholars Program is a voluntary, nationally recognized program. It provides opportunities for students to increase knowledge, strengthen leadership skills, and gain competencies within eight broad topic areas.

**Interprofessional Education/ Interprofessional Practice:** team-based care delivery, patient-centered care, effective teamwork

**Behavioral Health Integration:** services that better address the needs of individuals with behavioral, mental health and substance use conditions, including training for health professionals to address burnout and resiliency

**Connecting Communities and Supporting Health Professionals/ Community Health Workers (CHWs):** increase training and development of paraprofessionals who serve as connectors between health professionals and the community

**Virtual Learning and Telehealth:** leverage technology to improve curricula and community-based experiential training

**Social Determinants of Health:** economic stability, education, social and community context, health and health care, neighborhood and built environment

**Cultural Competency:** recognize and address the unique culture and health literacy of consumers

**Medical Practice Transformation:** quality improvement, care coordination, cost containment, rural health care, primary care, team-based care

**Current and Emerging Health Issues:** current HRSA-approved topics: opioids and substance use disorders, oral health as part of overall health

## Program Application

After reading the full program description and requirements, students apply to the program using this link. <https://redcap.link/communityengagementandserviceprogram>. This program has limited enrollment; decisions are made based on best fit for the program and community partners.

General program and application questions can be directed to: Patti Smith Urie, Outreach Professional, AHEC Scholars. [Patti.smith-urie@med.uvm.edu](mailto:Patti.smith-urie@med.uvm.edu)

## Field Activities – Currently Approved Sites

### 1. Champlain Valley Head Start

**AHEC lead:** Kathy Mariani, MD

**UVM/UVMMC partners:** Sujata Singh, MD, Ophthalmologist; Sheila Chamberlin, Orthoptist; Stacey Jordan, Audiologist

**Collaborators:** Justine Mee, Health Services Coordinator and Jennifer Fink, Family Services Coordinator  
Champlain Valley Head Start

#### Background

- Champlain Valley Head Start serves 223 children and their families in programming across four counties in Northwestern Vermont, including programs in rural areas of Franklin and Addison counties.
- CVHS early education and home visiting programs are free to families. Enrollment is based on financial eligibility or enrollment guidelines that prioritize children and families most in need (such as homelessness, child protective services, or refugee/immigrant newcomer status). CVHS families speak 17 languages. About 35% of families speak a language other than English.
- Enrolled children receive hearing, vision, and developmental screening each fall. In a typical year, around 10-15% of children have a need for vision follow-up after screening and on average 20-25% have a need for hearing follow-up.
- Larner students have worked on health and literacy projects with CVHS, including developing health follow-up events with providers such as Ophthalmologist Sujata Singh and Orthoptist Sheila Chamberlin at UVMMC to assist families with timely follow-up on concerns resulting from vision screenings. The events address several barriers, such as long waitlists and scheduling/attending appointments. [Closing Gaps: Larner Students Address Literacy and Nutrition in Burlington](#)
- CVHS has a partnership with an audiologist through the state of VT and UVMMC to provide follow-up screening and testing for children who did not pass hearing screening.
- CVHS is interested in identifying up to 6 LCOM students each year to continue and possibly expand on the activities described. With the partners listed above, Larner students will assist CVHS with health screening and follow-up events for children and families. As desired by CVHS, additional health and literacy related activities or events may also be developed.

This service opportunity may appeal to students interested in ophthalmology or hearing, early childhood development, and pediatrics or family medicine.

Some planning/coordination meetings may take place over zoom. In-person availability for events and activities is required - students and partners will determine mutually available dates that meet the needs of CVHS staff and families.

## 2. Feeding Champlain Valley

**AHEC Lead:** Patti Smith Urie

**Collaborators:** Ansley Laev, Volunteer Coordinator and Pat Chojnowski, Food Hub Supervisor, Feeding Champlain Valley

### Background

- Access to healthy food is a critical social determinant of health (SDOH). Healthy eating is influenced by many factors, such as transportation, availability, nutrition and food preparation knowledge, cost, cultural background, eating habits, health conditions and specific dietary needs.
- Charitable food programs have a long history of addressing hunger. In recent years many have incorporated additional aims related to overcoming stigma, providing culturally appropriate foods, reducing food waste, incorporating nutrition education, increasing healthier options, and supporting local farmers and food systems.
- Feeding Champlain Valley is a hunger relief nonprofit based in Burlington, serving four different counties in Vermont: Chittenden, Franklin, Grand Isle, and Addison. They believe food is a human right, and work to alleviate hunger by providing education and training, grocery distribution, meal production, food rescue, deliveries to homes and food access sites, an online market, food kiosks, and a food truck. [What We Do - Feeding Champlain Valley](#)
- Feeding Champlain Valley serves over 12,000 people a year, including 9,000 each month at the Burlington food shelf alone. There are over 100 volunteers across the different programs, doing tasks like stocking fresh food and dry goods, signing in clients as they shop, packing and delivering grocery boxes for delivery program.
- 40% of the food distributed has been donated or rescued. Rescued food means food saved from going to waste – it includes food picked from local grocery stores or gleaned (harvested) from fields.
- The agency has also developed innovative programs that are responsive to the community. One collaborative project, the Food Access Network, launched an online ordering system called PantrySoft to tailor weekly food boxes that are delivered to homes or picked up by recipients. See [Online ordering system created for Vermonters facing food insecurity - VTDigger](#).

There are many ways for Larner student volunteers to help advance the mission and goals of Feeding Champlain Valley and the various programs. This opportunity is ideally completed in scheduled shifts over a period of time. Programs generally run Mon-Friday during business hours. Students interested in completing 40 field hours of service with Feeding Champlain Valley should list specific interests. Assignments will prioritize the needs of the agency, balanced with student availability. Nearly all service hours are likely to be in-person.

Specific volunteer needs:

Packing & Delivery of Home Deliveries - Commitment of 1 day/week for 4-8 hours. Ideally a consistent day of the week (or a few students who can share a day of the week to aim for consistent coverage).

Gleaning & Delivery of Gleaned Produce in Grand Isle & Franklin Counties - **Starting mid-July to Mid-November**. Ideally a consistent day of the week on Tuesday, Wednesday or Thursday (or share with other students for consistent coverage).

### 3. Mercy Connections

**AHEC Lead:** Charles MacLean, MD

**Collaborators:** Kelly Moran, MSW, Justice and Mentoring Coordinator at Mercy Connections

#### **Background**

- Mercy Connections is a community organization that empowers people to make significant life changes through education, mentoring, entrepreneurship, and community. Their view of success is when: adults reach their goals in an inclusive, compassionate community; Vermont's economy is stronger because of new businesses started by Mercy Connections' graduates; people involved in the justice system successfully reenter our community; and Vermonters gain knowledge and connections that lead to healthy and fulfilling lives. [Home — Mercy Connections](#)
- Larner students in our Addiction Medicine and Community Engagement electives have collaborated with Mercy Connections over the past several years to learn about the organization as a whole, and more specifically about the [Justice, Mentoring & Reentry - Effective supports to help people — Mercy Connections](#). This program is focused on justice-involved women and helps with transition from prison, treatment court, addiction, and mental health needs.
- We are seeking to deepen our collaboration with Mercy Connections by making the knowledge, skills, and experience of health professions students available to the staff, volunteers, and clients of this highly effective community organization.
- Mercy Connections has facilitated Larner student initiatives to bring lifestyle medicine topics to women at the South Burlington women's facility and Mercy Connections community programs. Larner student leaders of the Culinary Medicine course piloted a series for students to provide nutrition, wellness, and hands on cooking instruction.
- Other students may be interested in bringing movement or other types of wellness activities into the facility or to Mercy Connections participants in the community upon re-entry.
- Students must complete a Department of Corrections background check and volunteer training prior to entering the corrections facility.

This service opportunity may appeal to students interested in the intersection of complex social issues and medical care, lifestyle or integrative Medicine, addiction medicine, and community engagement. Students chosen for this program should be able to commit to at least one five session series of events over time (weekly, bi-weekly, monthly). Morning, evening, and Saturday schedules are possible.

#### 4. AALV Youth Program

**AHEC lead:** Mark Pasanen, MD

**UVM/UVMMC partners:** Katie Wells, MD Director of Social Medicine

**Collaborators:** Samuel Dingba, AALV Youth Program

##### **Background:**

- The Association of Africans Living in Vermont is a non-profit organization in Burlington, VT. It started as a group of new Americans assisting other African new Americans resettling in Vermont, primarily through the federal Refugee Resettlement program. AALV has since broadened to support all immigrant groups.
- AALV mission: *“AALV helps new Americans from all parts of the world gain independence in their new communities through a range of integration services, including bridging case management, workforce development, behavioral health awareness, and interpreter services programming. With support from our multicultural, multilingual staff, our clients are able to smoothly transition to living and working in Vermont. Learn more at: [AALV](#)*
- There is a Youth Development program at AALV led by Samuel Dingba [Youth Development Program | aalv](#). Over the past few years, groups of medical students have attended youth program events and brought health and career exploration workshops to the students there.
- Sam and the youth participants are interested in expanding activities with Larner students. One idea is to participate in community service projects together, allowing both the medical student mentors and the youth program participants to contribute to the community.

This service opportunity may appeal to students interested in global health, migration, community responsiveness to newcomers, and working with adolescents or young adults. Students who are multilingual or have experience working with immigrant communities should list this in their application. Students interested in working with the AALV Youth Program will have an opportunity to build relationships with the participants and develop this service opportunity.

AALV's current interest for medical student volunteers is helping students in their late afternoon/early evening tutoring program. Additionally, Thursdays from 4:30-6:30 are a preferred day for monthly workshops or community field trips during the school year. Planning and prep time may happen over zoom or asynchronously, but all sessions with AALV youth will take place in person at the youth center or in the community.

## 5. The Janet S. Munt Family Room

**AHEC lead:** Mark Pasanen, MD

**UVM/UVMMC partners:** Katie Wells, MD Director of Social Medicine, LCOM Social Justice Coalition

**Collaborators:** Sarah Sinnott, Family and Community Engagement Director for the Family Room

### **Background:**

- The Janet S. Munt Family Room is a unique parent child center providing programs that are accessible to all and flexible enough to meet the needs of our changing community.
- Programs support connection for parents and families, provide education, promote physical, social, emotional, and linguistic development in children, and nurture a vibrant and diverse community. Learn more at: [Family Room Programs | Burlington VT | The Janet S. Munt Family Room \(thefamilyroomvt.org\)](#)
- Larner students have filled various volunteer roles at the Family Room, including
  - Helping to develop an ongoing “Super Group” for children who are on the autism spectrum or neurodiverse, along with their siblings and families. Super Group meets bi-weekly.
  - Attending monthly ‘paperwork nights’ where multilingual volunteers provide translation of forms and provide information for Spanish-speaking families. This is a collaborative effort with Bridges to Health and other community partners.
  - The LCOM Social Justice Coalition has helped organize and put on collaborative events such as health fairs, with various screenings and wellness focused activities.

This service opportunity may appeal to students interested in child development, neurodiversity, working with children and families, and partnering with other organizations. Students who are multilingual or have experience working with diverse populations should list this in their application.

A top priority for the Family Room is finding volunteers for Super Group on the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Monday from 4:30-6:30, the ASD Support Group on the 2<sup>nd</sup> Saturday of each month, as well as swimming lessons (Super Group and ASD Group) on Sundays. [Calendars FR - Google Sheets](#). Collaborating with the SJC leaders, students could also contribute to other activities or events, as needed.