

SPRING 2026

# Service Learning

Learn. Serve. Engage.



Each year, hundreds of Elmhurst University students contribute thousands of hours serving their local, national or global communities. Each semester, students welcome refugee families, mentor first-generation students, provide shelter for abandoned pets, advocate for human rights, promote the protection of our natural world and much, much more.

## Founders Connects Bluejays to their Roots in Service

Service has been foundational to Elmhurst University since its inception. During Founders Day on December 5, Bluejays recognized this call to service by packing cold-weather kits to share with Chicagoans struggling with housing. ElmU students sent messages of hope in gift bags filled with items to help keep warm. These bags were distributed by Night Ministry, a Chicago-based organization whose mission is to provide human connection, housing support and health care to members of our community. Bluejays travel to contribute to Night Ministry's efforts throughout the year, delivering traditional Thanksgiving dinners, cold-weather kits and spring hygiene packs. Thank you to Professor Kathy Sexton-Radek for making the connection with Night Ministry possible.



(ElmU students, staff and faculty came together on Founders Day to pack 100 cold weather kits to be delivered to Night Ministry clients.)



(ElmU students work with Dr. Sexton-Radek to deliver a traditional Thanksgiving meal to Night Ministry clients.)

# Service in their own Words

## Lily Rybalka: Northern Illinois Food Bank



*Lily Rybalka is a first-year student studying political science. She participated in service as part of her First-Year Seminar, The Greatest Generation.*

Lily reflected on her service experience: “When I showed up at the Northern Illinois Food Bank, I wasn’t exactly excited to be there. It was early, I was tired, and, honestly, I was a little annoyed about spending my weekend in a warehouse. Five hours later, when I left with my mom, something had changed. My heart felt warm, and I felt genuinely good about what I’d done. I had a new

perspective on my own life and on what it means to help others.



Looking back on my experience, I realize the term “service learning” makes sense. I really did learn something

important through this service. I learned that my problems, while real to me, aren’t as serious as what other people are dealing with. I learned that just showing up and helping can change not only the lives of the people you’re helping, but your own life, too. I started the day tired and annoyed but ended it feeling fulfilled and purposeful.”

## Elían Calderon: ROTC

*Elían Calderon is a junior who participates in the Reserve Officer Training Corp (ROTC). Elmhurst University partners with Wheaton College to connect Bluejays with the opportunity to serve with the ROTC Rolling Thunder Battalion. These students complete their education at Elmhurst University while conducting their military training at Wheaton College in preparation for service with the Army after graduation.*

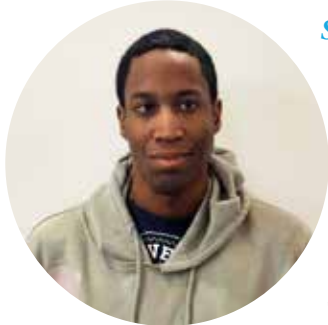
Elían shared the following about his experience: “ROTC involves critical thinking, leadership, teamwork, discipline and service. The military is a service to the community, whether people know it or not. Yes, we serve our country on the battlefield, but we also take the time to ensure our homeland is defended in other ways. We take the time to help out communities in need with scenarios like natural disaster relief. The smaller things we do are to inspire and educate the youth to become better leaders within their own communities. Serving in the military, even in ROTC, can bring a lot of different people together from different backgrounds. Service learning allowed me to learn what possibilities I have for my future career and how to drive myself toward those goals.”





# Service in their own Words

## Star Herring: Poised for Success



*Star Herring is a senior working toward a bachelor of arts in digital media. Service with Poised for Success, a local nonprofit helping outfit underprivileged women returning to the workforce, allowed Star to connect her classroom experiences to potential career paths.*

Star reflected on her service: “Working with Poised for Success felt very rewarding and welcoming to me. Gail and Mary were very professional and supportive with me and my ideas, and very willing to work together when collaborating. When first walking into Poised for Success, the atmosphere was very calming. Upon first hearing what they both are trying to achieve, I felt very sure that I was able to help them! It felt very good and rewarding to help them figure out concepts for photographs regarding their Giving Tuesday campaign and figuring out the areas that could be improved upon with them wanting to dive into social media!”



Among other contributions, Star designed this Giving Tuesday email campaign for Poised for Success

Poised for Success appreciated Star's service: “We are excited for the opportunity to continue working with such a creative and talented student. Star has graciously agreed to help us develop a social media video and assist with a new brochure, and we're looking forward to collaborating with her further.”

## Gianna Failla: Park Rose Animal Hospital



*Gianna Failla is a Fall 2025 grad who majored in biology. Gianna satisfied her experiential learning graduation requirement via EXP-250-05: Service Learning by serving at Park Rose Animal Hospital. Gianna shadowed a veterinarian where she learned not only about helping to keep small mammals happy and healthy, but also about the challenges of pet ownership and how to work with clients to find solutions to their pet's healthcare issues that work with their budget.*



Gianna says she learned much from her service: “Serving with Park Rose Animal Hospital increased my compassion and understanding. Many clients were not able to afford treatment or

diagnostic planning that the doctor strongly urged. This grew my compassion and understanding that everyone comes from different backgrounds, and you can't expect everyone to be able to follow through with treatments. The doctor would then plan out a new direction that the patient could follow as an alternate approach. I learned that you need to give people options and allow them to do the most that they can do for their pet. That is one of the biggest takeaways from this experience; being flexible and compassionate helps keep pets healthy.”

# Service and Civic Engagement



Emanuella

Bluejays **Neto Kalu** and **Emanuella Rey** are both serving in cohorts sponsored by Campus Compact, a national nonprofit organization that empowers colleges and universities to advance their academic and civic missions by partnering with communities to address complex social issues and further equity, justice and prosperity for all. Campus Compact facilitates programming such as the Newman Civic Fellowship and Up to Us Leadership Network.

Emanuella has been selected to represent Elmhurst

University in the inaugural Up to Us Leadership Network, a cohort that aims to empower student leaders with the fiscal knowledge and policy skills that allow them a seat at today's decision-making tables. Emanuella will spend the next six months participating in regional programming, while connecting virtually with students all over the nation to learn more about fiscal policy, leadership and advocacy.

In October, Neto, Elmhurst University's Newman Civic Fellow, convened with other fellows from around the country to learn how fellows could be a part of coalition building on their campuses and in their communities to increase capacity for positive social change.



Neto (second from right)

## We Want to Hear from You!

Tell us about how you are serving and learning in your community or find out how to get involved with one of the wonderful organizations highlighted in this issue. Our goal is to help you combine your interests and passions with community needs and opportunities.

We can also help you fulfill your Integrated Curriculum experiential learning graduation requirement through service. To learn more about how Elmhurst University members are serving their communities, learning about themselves and building their futures, visit [elmhurst.edu/Service-Learning](http://elmhurst.edu/Service-Learning)

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 **Elmhurst University**  
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