2026 MV Bank Community Choice Grant Nomination – HPCMV Volunteer Program

For 45 years, the volunteers of Hospice & Palliative Care of Martha's Vineyard (HPCMV) have embodied the organization's motto, Neighbors Helping Neighbors Since 1981. Our Volunteer Program strengthens the work of our professional team and enhances the quality of life of our patients, their families, and their caregivers. Our volunteers are dedicated to supporting our mission to provide dignified, compassionate, and individualized end-of-life and bereavement care for our Island community.

HPCMV's Patient Care Volunteers visit individuals in our care facing serious illness, offering companionship during what can be an isolating time. They provide respite for patient families and caregivers, allowing them time to rest or manage personal responsibilities. Volunteers can assist with light household tasks, run errands, walk dogs, read aloud, share stories, or sit with patients in quiet presence. These simple acts make a profound impact, easing loneliness, reducing caregiver stress, and helping ensure that no one in this community faces end-of-life alone.

Administrative Volunteers are equally vital. They answer phones when we are short-staffed or in meetings, ensuring every call for help is met with compassion. They pick up Island Grown Initiative (IGI) prepared meals weekly for patients, families and caregivers. They assist with inventory and organization of supplies and assembly of durable medical equipment, so clinicians can efficiently distribute these items to patients. They assist with data entry, mailings, patient surveys, volunteer program support, and provide other essential operational support to our team.

Event Volunteers further strengthen the organization by supporting fundraising efforts that sustain HPCMV's mission. From soliciting sponsorships and coordinating logistics to assisting with set-up and clean-up, their support helps secure the resources necessary for HPCMV to provide care regardless of a family's ability to pay.

Volunteers also play an important role in Camp by the Sea, HPCMV's one-day grief camp for children who have experienced the death of someone close to them. There, trained volunteers help create a safe, playful, and nurturing environment for children and families coping with grief. Every child camper is paired with a volunteer "buddy," whose warm presence ensures that their grief is not carried alone, and allows the opportunity for their parents or caregivers to participate in facilitated activities for adults.

HPCMV requires extensive orientation and training for Patient Care and Administrative Volunteers, as well as for our Board of Directors. Participants learn about the history and philosophy of hospice, the specific needs of the Martha's Vineyard community, and the practical and ethical responsibilities of their roles. The orientation and training requirements are equal to those of our staff members. Camp by the Sea volunteers receive specialized training in children's grief support. This investment in preparation underscores that while volunteers give freely of their time, the work they do is goal-focused, skilled, and serious.

Many volunteers are drawn to hospice after experiencing the death of someone close to them. They understand firsthand the comfort that compassionate end-of-life care can provide.

Volunteering can be a way to channel personal loss into service. HPCMV volunteers describe their work as personally gratifying, intellectually engaging, and emotionally meaningful.

By inviting neighbors into the mission of hospice, HPCMV fosters empathy, awareness, and shared responsibility. Volunteers become ambassadors for compassionate care, helping normalize conversations about serious illness, caregiving, and grief. Our volunteer program not only responds to community needs, but it also shapes a more connected and caring community.

Central to this program's success is Volunteer Coordinator Jennifer Angell. Her leadership, organization, and dedication have elevated the program to its current strength. Jennifer recruits volunteers through our website and community outreach. In order to be eligible to volunteer, a candidate must be interviewed, agree to background checks, and receive comprehensive ongoing training. She organizes volunteer meetings and coordinates with our clinical team to thoughtfully match volunteers to patients and assignments, ensuring safety and compatibility.

Jennifer fosters a culture of gratitude and support, recognizing that volunteers who feel valued are better equipped to serve. She organizes an annual volunteer appreciation event recognizing all who have completed one year or more of service. She also awards the annual Elaine Eugster Volunteer of the Year, honoring the "Always Say Yes" spirit of longtime volunteer Elaine Eugster. The award celebrates those who embody Elaine's dedication to hospice and inspires others to serve with the same enthusiasm.

HPCMV also offers support to our volunteers by inviting them to an annual remembrance ceremony to honor the lives of the patients they served as well as their own personal losses, while enjoying good food in the company of others with shared experience.

While many hospice organizations struggle to meet the Medicare requirement that 5% of total staff hours be covered by volunteers, HPCMV's Patient Care and Administrative Volunteers contributed an extraordinary monthly average of 14.5% of staff hours in 2025. This achievement demonstrates a deeply rooted culture of community care.

The measurable success of HPCMV's Volunteer Program is matched by its immeasurable human impact. Families receive much-needed support and respite. Patients experience companionship and dignity. Staff gain trusted partners in care. Adults and children navigating grief find comfort and understanding. Volunteers themselves discover renewed purpose, insight, and connection.

In an era when healthcare can feel impersonal and overstretched, HPCMV's Volunteer Program stands as a powerful example of what community-based care can achieve. Our neighbors helping neighbors are ordinary people choosing to show up in extraordinary ways. This program has made an ongoing impact on the Island community, offering care, comfort, and companionship during life's most vulnerable moments.