

Shepherd Center Community Benefit Report

Bridging Journeys



Shepherd
Center

FY 2025 (April 1, 2024 – March 31, 2025)



Table of Contents

- 1 Letter from Jamie Shepherd, CEO
- 2 About Shepherd Center
- 3 Quick Stats
- 4 Bridging Journeys
- 12 Shepherd Center's Investment in the Community
- 13 Community Benefit Overview
- 16 Partnerships

Dear Friends,

This year marked 50 years of world-class clinical care, research, and family support for people experiencing the most complex conditions, including spinal cord and brain injuries, multi-trauma, traumatic amputations, stroke, multiple sclerosis, and pain. Through the years of breakthroughs, milestones met, and lives restored, this remains true: Hope is Here.

While you will always find hope at Shepherd Center, we also cherish the opportunity to extend hope beyond our walls by giving back to the community that has supported Shepherd Center. Shepherd Center is deeply committed to our community, extending our reach through initiatives such as charity care, research, health professional education, and various community-building activities.

We understand that when our community is healthy and resilient, we all benefit. Our efforts highlight our continued commitment to treating individual patients while also fostering a healthier community as a whole. Whether caring for patients and families, educating today's and tomorrow's healthcare professionals, or providing essential programming throughout the community, hope is the common thread that ties it all together.

This document outlines the community benefits we offer by the numbers.

You can learn more about our mission and the work we do to achieve it at shepherd.org.

With gratitude,

Jamie Shepherd, MBA, MHA, FACHE
President and CEO, Shepherd Center



About Us

With five decades of experience, Shepherd Center provides world-class clinical care, research, and family support for people experiencing the most complex conditions, including spinal cord and brain injuries, multi-trauma, traumatic amputations, stroke, multiple sclerosis, and pain. An elite center ranked by *U.S. News* as one of the nation's top hospitals for rehabilitation, Shepherd Center is also recognized as both Spinal Cord Injury and Traumatic Brain Injury Model Systems. Shepherd Center treats thousands of patients annually with unmatched expertise and unwavering compassion to help them begin again.

With 152 beds, Shepherd Center is the largest neurorehabilitation hospital in the United States. Our mission is to help people with a temporary or permanent disability caused by injury or disease rebuild their lives with hope, independence, and dignity, advocating for their full inclusion in all aspects of community life while promoting safety and injury prevention.

Objective

Patients come to Shepherd Center from across the United States and the world seeking the best care and resources that are unique from other hospitals treating patients with similar injuries. Community benefit funding partially supports various value-added programs and services, such as recreation therapy, animal-assisted therapy, patient outings, chaplaincy, assistive technology, peer support, back-to-school programs, and family programs. We also offer specialized programs tailored to adolescents, patients with dual diagnosis (both brain and spinal cord injuries), patients who use ventilators, and patients with low-level brain injuries.

Patient-Centered Care

Shepherd Center focuses on patient-centered care and offers a broad continuum of care and exceptional quality that is unique in the setting of an acute care rehabilitation hospital. Our continuum of care includes Intensive Care Unit (ICU), acute care, Day Program, research programs, and outpatient programs, among others. Our value-added, or "community benefit," programs provide our patients with the resources to re-learn activities of daily living and achieve the goals they have set for themselves post-injury. Those goals include returning to home, school, and work as independently as possible. They also include regaining the ability to enjoy life through social events, hobbies, and leisure activities, as well as providing for themselves and their family. While these value-added programs help our patients restore hope and rebuild their lives, they are often not reimbursed by insurance, Medicare, or Medicaid. We believe these programs are essential to a patient's successful recovery and directly contribute to our outcomes, which often exceed national averages and lead to greater independence for patients. We provide these programs with the generous support of thousands of donors each year, and with any excess revenue the hospital earns through conservative financial management.

Shepherd Center defines community benefit as a planned, organized, and measured approach to services and activities that specifically address the healthcare needs of people with spinal cord and brain injury, stroke, chronic pain, traumatic amputations, multiple sclerosis, and other neurological conditions, as well as the family or loved ones impacted. Patients at Shepherd Center receive more than medical care; they receive the full continuum of care -- from evaluation and medical treatment to rehabilitation and lifelong support programs -- that extends back to their communities. Our patient population has unique needs that are often underserved, making Shepherd an important lifeline and resource throughout their lives. Shepherd Center's community includes current patients and their families, as well as former patients and their families.

Quick Stats



152

Licensed
beds



1516

Employees



13

Attending
Physiatrists



222

Nurses



186

Therapists





Bridging Journeys

The bridge from “I can’t” to “I can” is rarely built overnight. It is shaped over time, through experience, resilience, mentorship, setbacks, persistence, and self-discovery. And for many of us, that shift doesn’t happen alone. It often begins in the wake of a life-altering event, in moments when we feel uncertain, overwhelmed, or unsure of what the future looks like.

In those moments, someone steps in, someone listens, someone reassures, and someone shows us, sometimes before we believe it ourselves, that we are capable of moving forward. For many, that shift began at Shepherd Center, where support was not just offered but lived. Over time, the roles begin to shift. The person who once needed guidance becomes the one offering it. The one who once wondered, “How will I get through this?” becomes the one saying, “You will.” What began as personal healing grows into shared strength. When those who were once supported step forward to guide others through similar experiences, the bridge becomes more than a path from doubt to confidence; it becomes a thread that strengthens the entire community. It becomes a connection. It becomes legacy.

This piece explores that bridge from “I can’t to I can”, the journey from receiving help to becoming help, told through the voices of those who have lived it and now help others do the same.

To begin, we asked each participant to reflect on the moment their own bridge began.

We asked each contributor to share the moment when *“I can’t”* first began to shift toward *“I can.”*

Dr. Raeda Anderson's Bridge

Q: Can you provide some background on why you or a family member came to Shepherd Center?

My mother and I were in a terrible car wreck. She was admitted to Shepherd Center's ICU shortly after our wreck, and her life was rebuilt during her time at Shepherd Center.

Q: Can you describe a staff member who had a meaningful impact on your experience at Shepherd?

It wasn't a single person, but a place: the library. While my mom was doing the heavy lifting in therapy, I was in the library doing a different kind of heavy lifting – learning everything I could about disability and community participation. I come from a family where community is basically our love language, so I needed to understand how we'd maintain that in our new reality. Those chairs covered in book-patterned fabric in the library? They were my unofficial office. Honestly, it's no surprise I ended up in research at Shepherd, as the scientific research in the library imprinted on me.

Q: What specific actions did that person take that made a difference for you or your loved one?

While no one person guided me, that quiet space did. I needed room to be both a daughter and a scientist to process everything – the science, the emotions, and the plan moving forward. The library became my safe place to make sense of the world again.

Q: What difference did those actions make in your experience at Shepherd?

Before the wreck, I was a professor headed toward a doctorate with plans to study community participation. I had already started down that path, studying city service access of residents with disabilities, rural healthcare access via school-based health clinics, and food pantry distribution systems. Then I sat in that library, surrounded by books, and realized my path needed a pivot. I wanted to dedicate my work specifically to disability community participation. Shepherd Center's research department was a great place to do that work. Turns out my two superpowers, connecting with people and analyzing data, were exactly what the moment was shaping me for.



Q: Can you tell us about your current role here?

I am a research scientist at Shepherd Center's Virginia C. Crawford Research Institute, where I lead analytics to advance rehabilitation science. I am the senior scientist for the Accessibility User Research Collective (AURC), lead biostatistician for the Acquired Brain Injury Model Systems, lead data scientist for the Georgia Trauma Commission, and work closely with two Georgia State University partnerships with the Department of Sociology and Institute for Insight.

My work focuses on using a large amount of data from different sources to generate actionable insights that improve patient outcomes and inform evidence-based practice. I also direct the iCORD Lab at Georgia State University and serve as an Affiliate Professor in Sociology, fostering collaborations that bridge clinical research and social science.

Q: How has your own experience at Shepherd influenced the way you approach your work now?

In short: I get it. I understand the families, the caregivers, the high moments, and the low moments. My personal experience helps me be a better scientist every day, as it reminds me that those numbers on the screen are much more than just numbers; they are people.

As a family member, I saw up close how uniquely collaborative Shepherd Center is for patient care and research. I even once had lunch with Gary Ulicny, the CEO at the time, who talked about everyone working toward one shared goal. That message stuck with me. Now as a scientist, I see my role as helping bridge research, analytics, and clinical teams all in service of that same goal: helping disabled people thrive and return to their communities.

Q: What is something you intentionally do for others now because it was once done for you at this facility?

Small acts of kindness. A hello, a smile, an elevator door held at just the right moment as these things matter.

I still remember hauling a carload of stuff to my mom's ICU room because my dad refused to leave her side. I got about three feet into the building before several Shepherd employees swooped in like kindness superheroes, helping me carry stuff up to my mom's room and taking the time to check in on me.

Fast-forward eight years: Now a scientist at Shepherd Center, I am leaving after a long day of data analysis, when I see a young woman carrying a mountain of belongings and asking for the ICU. Without hesitation, I scooped up what she was carrying and walked with her, mirroring the kindness once given to me. We ended with a big hug and me telling her what I knew to be true — Shepherd Center would take care of her loved one, and of her.

Q: How does having experience on both sides, receiving support and now providing it, change the way you interact with people who come through our doors?

Shepherd Center stood with my family at one of the hardest moments of our lives. Now I have the privilege of leading research that helps improve rehabilitation outcomes and community participation for people with disabilities. With training in analytics and social sciences paired with lived experience at Shepherd, I can understand our data both analytically and personally. It shapes every interaction I have and grounds me in gratitude and purpose.





The Noble Learning Resource Center (NLRC)

When Shepherd Center first opened its doors in Atlanta in 1975, it was a small, six-bed spinal cord injury unit driven by an ambitious idea: healing should extend beyond the hospital room. From the very beginning, information, education, and understanding were seen as essential parts of recovery. Out of that belief, a library quietly took shape—one that would grow alongside the hospital itself.

As Shepherd Center expanded into a world-renowned neurorehabilitation facility with more than 150 beds, the library evolved as well. Today, it is known as the Noble Learning Resource Center (NLRC), a place where medicine meets meaning. More than shelves and screens, the NLRC became a bridge between clinical care and human experience.

Over the years, the library has preserved the story of Shepherd Center itself. Tucked within its historical archives are photographs, memorabilia, and records that trace pivotal moments—like the hospital's move to its Peachtree Road location in 1982. These archives don't just document growth; they honor resilience, innovation, and the countless lives changed within the walls of Shepherd Center.

In its modern role, the NLRC serves as a specialized hub of knowledge focused on spinal cord injuries, brain injuries, stroke, multiple sclerosis, post-polio, and other neurological conditions. Unlike many private medical libraries, its doors are open—not only to clinicians, but to patients, families, and members of the wider community searching for trustworthy answers. At the heart of the library's work is a professional medical librarian, skilled not only in research but in listening, translating, and guiding people through moments of uncertainty.

The Noble Learning Resource Center is thoughtfully divided into three spaces: a clinical library supporting physicians and researchers, a consumer library dedicated to patient and family education, and the historical archives that safeguard the institution's legacy. Medical databases and scholarly literature are available to staff through the hospital intranet, while patients and families can access the same tools from dedicated library computers.

For many visitors, the library becomes a refuge during overwhelming times. Here, complex diagnoses are broken down into clear language. Educational books, journals, and DVDs help families understand trauma, mental health, and life after injury. The librarian assists with literature searches, tracks down medical articles, and helps people make sense of an often-confusing flood of information—offering clarity when it's needed most.

The NLRC also supports the practical realities of life during hospitalization. Patients and families use library computers to research insurance options, housing, and specialized care. During election seasons, the library even provides emergency voting resources, helping patients exercise their right to vote while hospitalized. Importantly, the library's support doesn't end at discharge. Former patients can continue to email the librarian with general medical questions as they transition back into their communities. Through partnerships with Shepherd Center's Injury Prevention Program and outreach teams, the NLRC extends its educational mission beyond the hospital, reinforcing long-term safety, independence, and confidence.

Located on the first floor of the Shepherd Building and open weekdays, the Noble Learning Resource Center remains a steady presence—both a physical space and a philosophy. Together with the MyShepherdConnection online hub, it ensures that knowledge is always within reach.

From a modest beginning to a vital center of learning, the NLRC stands as a reminder that healing is not only about treatment, but about understanding, empowerment, and hope.

Kim Ross' Bridge

Q: Can you provide some background on why you or a family member came to Shepherd Center?

In 2019, my 20-year-old son sustained a traumatic brain injury in a car accident.

Q: Can you describe a staff member who had a meaningful impact on your experience at Shepherd?

Mariellen Jacobs, Peer Support Liaison

Q: What specific actions did that person take that made a difference for you or your loved one?

She comfortably showed up in my son's room, introduced herself, explained to me she knew what my family was going through because of what her family had been through, and she kept showing up to support and encourage us day after day, week after week, month after month.

Q: What difference did those actions make in your experience at Shepherd?

Having someone to talk to, ask questions to, and just to lean into who had been on the familiar road we were now on, it helped me process the trauma we were faced with, the next steps of rehab, along with the uncertainty of our son's recovery.

Q: Can you tell us about your current role here?

My current role at Shepherd is the Family Peer Support Lead

Q: How has your own experience at Shepherd influenced the way you approach your work now?

I always approach my coworkers, caregivers, etc., with kindness. We work in a place where people are faced/ facing the worst situation that they've, hopefully, ever been in. I feel, no matter what we are dealing with in our personal lives, we should greet them with kindness.

Q: What is something you intentionally do for others now because it was once done for you at this facility?

I support the caregivers who arrive here with their loved ones.

Q: How does having experience on both sides, receiving support and now providing it, change the way you interact with people who come through our doors?

Because of what happened to my son, I know what it's like to suffer trauma and to become a caregiver unexpectedly. This enables me to show empathy to our caregivers, understanding their feelings, and also, enables me to guide them through the transition of rehab and recovery.

Q: What does it mean to you to see support continue through the same space, in a different form?

Honestly, it's a pleasure to be able to give back what was once given to me.





Peer Support

Shepherd Center's Peer Support Program is a community like no other, led by former patients and caregivers who understand firsthand the unique challenges patients and families may be facing. By connecting with others who share similar experiences, patients and their families can connect with these stories, discover insights that can't be found anywhere else, and experience the support of a community that truly understands every step of the rehabilitation journey.

The peer support community is a rich resource, offering guidance on everything from returning home and navigating daily life to getting back to school or work. Research shows that patients and families who connect with peers experience more successful rehabilitation and are more likely to maintain that progress long after returning home.

At the heart of Shepherd's program is empathy-rich communication, helping patients and families navigate each stage of change, rediscover independence, and build the confidence to live fully. Connecting with someone who truly understands what you're going through can be transformative — that's why we offer a variety of ways to engage with our Peer Support community.

Our opportunities go far beyond traditional one-on-one sessions:

- » **Group meetings:** Individuals from diverse backgrounds come together to share experiences and foster meaningful connections.
- » **Community events:** Group dinners, outings, and seasonal gatherings allow you to experience the joys of camaraderie and explore life beyond rehabilitation.
- » **Education and co-treatment sessions:** Learn alongside your therapist and access resources designed to support your full recovery.
- » **Virtual meetings:** Connect via phone, FaceTime, and other digital platforms, making support accessible wherever you are.

The goal is to make Peer Support easily accessible, so patients and their families never feel alone on this journey.

In 2024, Shepherd Center invested over
\$10.3 million
in our communities.

\$5.3M
Charity
Care



\$2.4M
Community
Health
Improvement
Services

\$1.8M
Community
Building
Activities

\$431K
Health
Professions
Education

\$69K
Subsidized
Health
Services

\$40K
Contributions
to other
Community
Groups

Our commitment
to supporting
the community,
every day!



Community Benefit Overview

Shepherd Center provided \$10.3 million to the community through benefits to our patients and their families. Shepherd Center defines Community Benefit as a planned, organized, and measured approach to services and activities that specifically address the healthcare needs of people with spinal cord and brain injury, stroke, chronic pain, multiple sclerosis, and other neurological conditions, as well as the family or loved ones impacted. Patients at Shepherd Center get more than medical care; they also receive evaluation and medical treatment, rehabilitation, and lifelong support programs that extend back to their communities. Shepherd Center's patient population has unique needs that are often underserved, making Shepherd an important lifeline and resource for our patients throughout their lives. Shepherd Center's community includes current patients and their families, as well as former patients and their families.

Charity and Other Unreimbursed Care

Shepherd Center provided \$5.3 million to charity and other unreimbursed programs. Shepherd Center maintains records to identify and monitor the level of charity care it provides, including the amount of charges foregone for services and supplies furnished under the charity care policy and the estimated cost of those services and supplies. In addition to charity care, Shepherd Center provides many other services not typically paid for by insurance or government payors, such as recreation therapy, vocational services, and transition support.

Subsidized Health Services

In an effort to meet a community need and provide quality care to people who sustain catastrophic injuries, Shepherd Center provided \$69k in subsidized health services despite incurring a financial loss. These services include, but are not limited to, animal-assisted therapy, rehab technology, and patient equipment. Shepherd Center can provide many of these services that are not available at other hospitals.

Research

Shepherd Center is a site for leading-edge research and provides important outcomes tracking that helps shape the face of rehabilitation in the United States. In collaboration with academic and industry partners, we work to engineer new products and tools and advise industry partners on making the world more accessible for people with disabilities. Our research falls into five areas: spinal cord injury research, brain injury research, multiple sclerosis research, industry-sponsored trials, and user experience, accessibility, and usability research.

Health Professions Education

Shepherd Center takes a leadership role in educating healthcare professionals, including physicians, nurses, and therapists who specialize in neurorehabilitation. Shepherd Center's innovative and evidence-based programs include: Postdoctoral fellowship training in brain injury, multiple sclerosis, and spinal cord injury; specialized internships, fellowships, and residencies in nursing, pharmacy, psychology, and therapy; professional education offered through our NeuroRehabilitation Learning Institute.

Community Building

Our community-building activities address the social, economic, and environmental conditions that influence the priority health needs identified in our Community Health Needs Assessment (CHNA). While these initiatives may not correspond to a single clinical health priority, they support long-term improvements in community conditions that drive health outcomes. For example, Shepherd Center provides temporary housing at no cost for families of newly injured rehabilitation patients who live more than 50 miles from the hospital. To remain the world's premier rehabilitation destination and ensure that every patient and family experience delivers the best possible outcome, Shepherd Center increased the family housing capacity to accommodate the entire length of stay by building the Arthur M. Blank Family Residences, which opened in late 2024.

Community Health Improvement Services

Community health improvement services are initiatives designed to address the most pressing health needs in our community and do not generate inpatient or outpatient bills. These programs focus on prevention, early detection, disease management, and improving access to care, particularly for underserved populations. Shepherd Center's annual Adventure Skills Workshop (ASW) offers a full array of inclusive outdoor activities for individuals with spinal cord injury or disease, acquired brain injury, multiple sclerosis, and other neurological conditions. Participants in ASW can choose from a variety of sports and activities, including tubing, jet skiing, water skiing, scuba diving, swimming, water polo, fishing, canoeing/kayaking, riflery/skeet shooting, and art. ASW is held every year in May at Camp ASCCA, an accessible facility located on Lake Martin near Jackson's Gap, Alabama.

Financial and In-Kind Contributions to Other Community Groups

Shepherd Center sponsors the Wheelchair Division of the Northside Hospital Peachtree Road Race in Atlanta, where world-class athletes compete in this annual 10K event. The Wheelchair Division follows the course set for the Northside Hospital Peachtree Road Race foot racers — 6.2 miles down Peachtree Road, starting at Lenox Road and ending on 10th Street at Piedmont Park in Midtown Atlanta. Shepherd Center strives to promote equality among elite wheelchair athletes by awarding prizes to top finishers in varying categories.





Partnerships

Community Partnerships are integral to the success of Shepherd Center.

Community partnerships are integral to Shepherd Center's success. Shepherd Center has more than 200 industry and academic partnerships to advance research and innovation. Sharing knowledge is the key to making progress for the people we serve. We collaborate with leading universities, including Georgia Tech and the University of Georgia, to advance brain and spinal cord injury medicine and technology. Shepherd researchers also collaborate with international corporate technology partners, such as Ekso Bionics, to test and enhance new assistive and therapeutic technologies, including robotic devices to help restore function and assist with walking. Our partners understand that our consumers are extremely underserved and need as much support as possible to achieve the fullest level of recovery and quality of life.

Our partners include, but are not limited to:







Shepherd Center

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