Dempsey Center
2019 Report to the Community

Celebrating a year of growth!
Dear Friends,

The Dempsey Center is committed to making life better for people who are managing the impact of cancer. During our first full year as an independent nonprofit operating out of two locations, 2019 was a year of growth in so many ways:

- Continued expansion of services in South Portland
- Investment in infrastructure to increase community impact and improve the client experience
- Launch of a volunteer ambassador program in which trained volunteers provide orientations to first-time visitors to the Dempsey Center

As over 8,600 Mainers and their families face new cancer diagnoses each year, we continue to focus on our vision of a world where people impacted by cancer have access to comprehensive support services close to home and provided at no cost.

The Dempsey Center relies on the passion, commitment, and support of so many people - donors, volunteers, staff, and community partners.

Thank you for being part of the Dempsey Center’s work and for your contribution to making life better for Mainers impacted by cancer.

Wendy Tardif, Executive Director  
Bill Williams, Board of Directors Chair

2019 was an amazing year for the Dempsey Center!

When we began this work over a decade ago, we couldn’t have imagined where we’d be today. Yet, here we are - reporting on our first full year as an independent nonprofit organization operating out of two locations.

In addition to expanding our work in Maine, the Dempsey Center received national recognition for our work this past year. And we’ve made connections with like-minded organizations from coast to coast.

We couldn’t do it without the support of so many volunteers, staff, donors, corporate partners – people like you who understand that the high-touch, research-based services provided at the Dempsey Center result in better outcomes for cancer patients and their families.

Thank you for being part of our team and helping to make life better for people managing the impact of cancer.

The day Clarisa Pérez-Armendáriz learned she had breast cancer, she and her husband Bruno left their Auburn home and headed to the Dempsey Center, a place they had heard about, but never visited. They did so at Bruno’s urging.

“My husband just knew,” she says with a laugh. “He knew my personality and he knew that I would want information and resources and to face it head on. So, we came to the Dempsey Center and soon we didn’t stop coming.”

It was, Clarisa recalls, the absolute best decision they could have made for each other and their two daughters.

An Associate Professor of Politics and Chair of Latin American Studies at Bates College, Clarisa soon recognized that the Dempsey Center provided the perfect blend of information and resources she craved and support for her entire family that she came to rely on.

At the Dempsey Center, Clarisa went to counseling alone and with Bruno, and had Reiki and acupuncture sessions to help reduce the nausea and fatigue brought on by chemotherapy. Her daughters, ages seven and thirteen at the time, attended Healing Tree programs - bravely and honestly confronting the reality of cancer.

“When my youngest daughter told my Mom that three of the kids in her counseling session had lost their mothers, my Mom burst into tears,” Clarisa recalls. “But my daughter said, ‘It’s okay, Nana. Everyone has their time.’ It was incredible to hear a seven-year-old say that. That’s the kind of nurturing atmosphere the Dempsey Center provides for kids. It gives them a safe place to talk about these things honestly.”

A native of Mexico, Clarisa has a very tight-knit family. Her mother came to Maine for ten weeks to support Clarisa, and soon ended up in yoga sessions at the Center.

In remission since last August, Clarisa has jumped right back into her busy life. She hopes to become a volunteer cancer mentor when she’s further along the recovery road. Until then, she says, she urges everyone she knows to help support her community’s treasured resource.

“The Dempsey Center is such a meaningful place,” says Clarisa. “I don’t know what I would have done without them. It’s a really special place.”
“What makes the Dempsey Center so unique is its commitment to caregivers and family members.”

An oncology massage therapist at the Dempsey Center, Michael Gelsanliter has been working with cancer patients since he started with the Cancer Community Center in 2007. He stayed on through the 2018 merger and has kept pace with the growth we’ve experienced since then.

Michael has watched his field gain wider acceptance in the medical community as an important tool in integrative cancer treatment.

“As a member of their care team, it’s so important that we understand our client’s medical history so we can adjust our massage to meet their needs,” says Michael. “And we make sure to take the time to listen first.”

Like all Dempsey Center providers, Michael takes the time to look past the medical records and focus on the person.

Cancer can bring up feelings of fear, depression, stress, and deep fatigue. While most of us automatically associate those feelings with cancer patients, Michael says they can also apply to caregivers and family members.

“What makes the Dempsey Center unique is its commitment to caregivers and family members,” Michael explains. “Their sacrifice and the emotional toll on them is often overlooked. It’s a heavy burden to watch a loved one suffer. By extending services to them, we support them as much as we can.”

Whether they’re a patient or caregiver, nothing makes him feel better, he says, than seeing a massage recipient breathe a big sigh of relief, smile, and then make a beeline for the front desk to book another appointment.

In addition to his work at the Dempsey Center, Michael runs a private practice, offers oncology massage services with hospice patients and at infusion centers, and teaches Massage for People with Cancer at the New Hampshire Institute for Therapeutic Arts.

It’s clear he has a special place in his heart for the Dempsey Center. “I’m so honored to help people the way that I can,” he beams. “And to do it with such a tremendous organization like the Dempsey Center.”
Karen Bradbury,
Dempsey Center Board Member

“It’s uplifting and powerful to watch how the donations we receive translate into care for individuals and families facing cancer.”

When people talk about the Dempsey Center, they’re not simply talking about a building with walls, a roof, and a foundation.

From Karen Bradbury’s perspective as a board member, donor, and breast cancer survivor, it’s the human connection that makes the Dempsey Center so special.

“What I consistently hear from people is that it is such a warm supportive environment that envelops a person in a very positive, safe, and nurturing way,” Karen explains. “I’ve never seen or experienced the level of warmth and support I see every time I’m at the Dempsey Center.”

A native of Lincoln, Maine, Karen’s extensive involvement with the Center began in 2008, when she moved back to the state with her family after years of living out of state. She volunteered for the Cancer Community Center, serving on the board for five years. After the merger, Karen was asked to make the transition to the Dempsey Center board.

Karen serves as governance committee chair for the Dempsey Center board of directors. Given her position as a vice president of learning and development at Unum, she’s no stranger to conference tables and whiteboards.

The Dempsey boardroom, Karen notes, is unique. Largely because the bottom-line goal from day one has been to provide the human touch that treats the person, not the disease. It’s a phrase emphasized by Patrick Dempsey, the organization’s founder and board member.

“Patrick has such a positive impact on people here,” says Karen. “Whether that’s giving a visitor a hug and listening to them or taking part in guiding the direction of the Center. His level of involvement is really incredible.”

As a breast cancer survivor, Karen knows the disease exacts a huge emotional toll. As a monthly donor and Challenge participant, she knows her financial contributions make a difference in people’s lives.

“For anyone who’s ever thought of donating to the Dempsey Center,” says Karen. “Know that your financial support is a game-changer for the people we serve. It’s uplifting and powerful to watch how the donations we get translate into care for individuals and families facing cancer.”

Youth Fundraiser

Top 2019 Dempsey Challenge youth fundraiser doubles his goal for 2020.

Just eighteen months after losing his beloved father Seth, 16-year-old Ethan Helle of Brunswick raised over $5,000 for the 2019 Dempsey Challenge as a member of Team #MarcyStrong. This year, he hopes to raise double that amount!

Ethan’s mother Amy says he was staggered by his father’s death from aggressive brain cancer. Ethan and his dad had been inseparable, spending countless hours together in Seth’s woodworking shop, playing basketball, or hitting golf balls in the yard.

Amy says it wasn’t until she and Ethan started going to the Dempsey Center months later that she saw some of Ethan’s grief and anger dissipate and a smile return to his face.

Ethan was our top Dempsey Challenge youth fundraiser last year. And he plans to hold onto that title for 2020. Fundraising on social media, Ethan is raffling off some of his father’s stunning photography prints, organizing a glowball tournament, and gathering more Dempsey Center donors.

His mother is understandably very proud of him. So are we, and without question, his dad would be too!
Our Mission

to make life better for people managing the impact of cancer

Our Vision

a world where people impacted by cancer have access to comprehensive support services close to home and provided at no cost

Our Work

providing research-based and evidence-informed services that improve the health and well-being of people impacted by a cancer diagnosis

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