

**Unity House of Troy**  
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*The Front Door at  
2431 Sixth Avenue in Troy, NY*



# INSIDE

## unity house




*Making Life Better*

## Update from The Front Door

### Unity House's new Community Resource Center sees dramatic increase in use of services

Unity House's new home, called The Front Door, is a compassionate gateway for people in need. Offering more than just daytime respite for people who are homeless and others in need, the new and expanded offerings connect people to services in new ways. Services such as case management, housing support services, domestic violence services and employment training are now accessible under one roof to provide comprehensive care – all to improve the lives of people living in poverty or those living with serious challenges. The chart below comparing one month, shows the increase in demand for just some of the available services at The Front Door:

#### Service Snapshot

	MARCH 2013	MARCH 2014
 <b>Food Pantry Meals</b>	5,373 meals provided	9,360 meals provided
 <b>Bethany Community Meals Program</b>	2,719 meals served	3,903 meals served
 <b>Laundry Room</b>	In the past, we weren't able to offer a space for someone in need to bathe or clean their clothes	54 people did 103 loads of laundry and 28 people were able to take 97 showers
 <b>Volunteers: Individuals and groups in service in a variety of programs at The Front Door</b>	48 hours of volunteer work	382 hours of volunteer work

#### MISSION STATEMENT

Unity House is dedicated to enhancing the quality of life for people living in poverty, adults with mental illness, victims of domestic violence, people living with HIV/AIDS, and others whose needs can effectively be met by Unity House services and philosophy.

# BLOG

## Burke's Blog



**When I look back to where we were at this time last year, it is amazing to think about all that has happened since then.**

Last summer we were in the midst of construction on Unity House's new home, The Front Door, a community resource center for all at 2431 Sixth Avenue in Troy. Our staff were displaced, working in temporary (read: tight) quarters and people who came to Unity House for help were dealing with finding help in different locations. I am happy to say our dedicated staff in the program we called 'Street Ministry' were able to adjust; meeting the needs of consumers and navigating a move to our new home when construction was complete in October 2013.

The Capital Campaign was full-steam ahead, raising dollars as we raised beams. I want to again extend heartfelt thanks to the hundreds of donors who supported our capital campaign and to our capital campaign committee for their dedication to Unity House.

At The Front Door we consolidated many of our human services under one roof. (The Unity Sunshine Program and the Domestic Violence Services Programs remain in their current locations.) One can find at The Front Door, the Bethany Community Meals Program, Housing Support and Mental Health services, our Volunteer Program, and Community Resources. Formerly called 'Street Ministry' from the original Unity House founding in 1971, Community Resources is a program that welcomes all people in need.

Community Resources is the gateway. It is where everyone starts when they walk through the front door. They are greeted warmly in our lobby, and are offered an intake. A family might choose to access our food pantry or shop in our thrift store. A guest might enjoy a meal at Bethany where sometimes as many as 175 people come for breakfast and lunch. Some will talk to staff about housing, sign up for a free course on financial literacy, enjoy an afternoon happening at Bethany or use the computers in our library. Others may need to do laundry or take a shower; they might take advantage of our job coaching and employment referral services. There are many ways people can help themselves at The Front Door, and we are thrilled to see people here every day, using this community resource.

**People come to Unity House to fill needs that can't be filled elsewhere. Sometimes they have nowhere else to turn.**

Our new home offers the chance to welcome people in need and help them create a plan of action. That is where being at The Front Door has paid off: having programs co-located is not just a cost savings, it's an opportunity to introduce beneficial services in a non-judgmental way. It's a whole lot easier to broach a conversation about housing when a case manager from housing happens to be having lunch at the table next to yours in Bethany. Browsing through clothes at ReStyle where staff and volunteers work makes for a powerful example of how job coaching can start.

One of my favorite things about The Front Door is the integration that has been such a benefit, sometimes in unforeseen ways. We knew we would benefit from the natural symbiosis among programs that comes from being under one roof, but I could not have predicted how nice it would be to see volunteers in action. One of my favorite volunteers is Mary Jane Smith, who can often be seen on the 2nd floor for her volunteer shift at Bethany. Mary Jane was one of the original three founders of Unity House back in 1971 along with Regis Obijiski and the late Peter Callaghan.

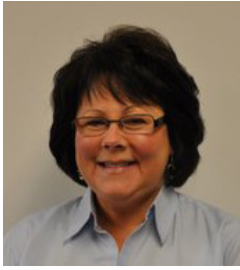
To look back at how Unity House has changed and grown over the years is both amazing and humbling. None of the good work that Unity House does and the positive changes we've had as an organization would be possible without the support of countless donors. I'm often reminded that our donors want confirmation that the dollars they entrust do make a difference. I'm glad we now have a home where I can invite donors to see the work we do and to meet the people who are empowered by the help they receive from Unity House through the generosity of others.

If you haven't already, I invite you to visit The Front Door. Come see how you help make life better.

With gratitude,

*Chris*

Chris Burke  
Chief Executive Officer



## New Director for Unity Sunshine!

Susan Rimkunas is now Director of Unity Sunshine Program. She oversees the program's child care, early intervention, special needs, universal pre-k and traveling summer camp programs. Susan has a strong belief in supporting children, emphasizing those who have difficulty learning. She has worked in the field of education for 28 years and has held a multitude of respected positions. Susan has worked at the Emma Willard School as both a teacher and a program director and at the Albany Academies as an administrator. Most recently, she held the position of Assistant Director of Child Care

at Unity House.

"Through Susan's time at Unity House she has proven herself to be passionate and dedicated to the continuing development of children, parents, teachers and the greater good of the Unity House organization," said Unity House CEO Chris Burke.

Susan has Bachelor's and Masters degrees in education from Long Island University and University at Albany respectively. She has particular interest in continuing to learn about brain development and the implications for teaching and learning.

## Unity Sunshine Program Gets a Special Visit!

Acting Assistant Secretary for Special Education and Rehabilitative Services at the US Department of Education, Michael Yudin, visited the Albany location of the Unity Sunshine Program in April. Mr. Yudin came to see the fully integrated and inclusive early learning setting for young children with disabilities to learn alongside their typically developing peers. Mr. Yudin met with children and their families and spoke of how critical it is for states and local providers to engage, support and empower families of young children with disabilities. On the U.S. Department of Education's website, where Mr. Yudin blogged about his visit to Unity Sunshine, he wrote, "While it is imperative that all young children have access to screening and appropriate services, research highlights the need to ensure developmental screening in low-income, racially diverse urban populations, where the risk of delay is greater and access

to services can be more difficult." We are grateful for Mr. Yudin's visit and for highlighting the need to ensure services for people who have historically been underserved.

The Unity Sunshine Program provides early intervention and pre-school developmental services in speech/language, physical and occupational therapy, psychological consultation and general skills. The program has four centers- three in Troy and one in downtown Albany- for therapy and educational services. Knowing your child is cared for in a safe, nurturing environment is invaluable to any parent- whether your child has developmental delays or is developing at a typical pace.



**DID YOU KNOW THE UNITY SUNSHINE PROGRAM SERVES 425 OF CHILDREN AGES 6 WEEKS TO FIVE YEARS OF AGE?**

There are open spaces available in some rooms. Interested families looking for quality, affordable care should arrange for a tour by calling (518) 274-3234.



**Summer Means Camp!**

## Traveling Summer Camp

Did you know that Unity House provides children an opportunity to get out of the city each day and play? Thanks to the generosity of supporters like **The Robison Family Foundation**, inner-city kids have a chance to visit state parks, swimming pools and museums with Unity House's Traveling Summer Day Camp. If you'd like to help broaden a child's horizons, consider making a donation to the Unity House Traveling Summer Camp.

## Community Resources Serving More at The Front Door

Formerly called Street Ministry, the Community Resources program at Unity House is often the first contact for those seeking help and kindness. The Community Resources program provides emergency food, clothing, housing assistance, crisis intervention, advocacy and referrals to prevent homelessness and to link people to services in the community.

There is a welcoming lobby at the Front Door where guests are greeted and directed. Sometimes it's to the food pantry or for assistance at ReStyle, our thrift store that stocks clothing and household goods. Many times, guests head straight to the second floor, where the Bethany community meals program offers breakfast and lunch daily. Other times, it's referrals to other programs, some within Unity House some with community partners. Often, it's a chance to talk and get direction. This year, we saw many seeking relief for their high utility bills when prices spiked in late winter. Case managers are trained to help consumers complete an application through National Grid's Care and Share program.

With the move to the Front Door, Unity House is able to serve more people, connecting them more easily to a variety of services.



### HOW DOES YOUR GARDEN GROW? DO YOU HAVE LEFTOVER PRODUCE FROM YOUR GARDEN?

Thanks to the good work of Capital District Community Gardens, Unity House is once again gardening in a community garden plot. This year, our garden plot is one block away from The Front Door. Plants have been sown and we look forward to having fresh vegetables for Bethany Community Meals. Consider sharing your bounty with Unity House. The Bethany Community Meals program and our food pantry are always in need of fresh fruits and vegetables.

“ Every day we encounter people in need who come through our doors completely overwhelmed and struggling to manage their stress. We see that stress melt away as soon as they realize we have food, clothing, support and connections to help them meet their most basic needs in an environment that honors each person as inherently deserving of basic human rights. While this has always been the philosophy of Unity House, we are better able to put our mission into everyday practice, thanks to our new building and all the people who made it possible. ”

— Christine Nealon, Service Director  
of Community Resources



Last spring one of our community residences received this wonderful gazebo as a donation.

## Housing Support Services

Unity House offers several housing and case management options so that adults living with mental illness, people with HIV/AIDS, people who are homeless, young adults, individuals with chemical addiction and individuals living with major medical issues can live safely and self sufficiently in the community with dignity and independence.

- Four Community Residences offer a structured, supportive environment for adults living with mental illness, with 24/7 staff support. Services foster skill building necessary to transition to more independent settings.
- Transitional Apartment Services provides safe, secure furnished apartments for adults living with mental illness. Services are provided through home visits up to 7 days a week, based upon individual needs.
- Supported Housing provides assistance in securing and maintaining safe, permanent housing as well as comprehensive case management services for both adults living with mental illness and those living with HIV/AIDS.
- Community Housing Assistance Program provides comprehensive case management services including assistance in securing and maintaining permanent housing for adults living with mental illness with a history of chronic homelessness.
- Case Management services help young adults who are mentally ill and chemically addicted live independently while they seek treatment.
- Health Home Care Management provides comprehensive case management to individuals who are high users of Medicaid through hospitalizations and ER admissions.

# At Sojourner Place, an Infusion of Love that Ripples

## How does a teddy bear make its way from the loving arms of a child to the hands of a vulnerable child in need?

Children who come to Sojourner Place, the new Unity House shelter for victims of domestic violence, often arrive with nothing more than the clothes on their back. Thanks to the Bear Hugs Project, they are given a friend upon arrival who offers love and comfort. Diane Ryan, Service Director at Unity House's shelter, told us about the Bear Hugs Project and we had to learn more.

The Bear Hugs Project is part of "Bridging People and Places", founded by Hollie Vanderzee in 2000. A small, not-for-profit group with no paid staff and a big heart, the group's mission is to connect those willing to volunteer their time with programs designed to bring comfort to others during difficult times. They believe that such service should have value for both the giver and the receiver. And boy, do they deliver!

Now headed by Lorraine Thompson, The Bear Hugs Project sends a gift of a teddy bear infused with love to children in challenging situations, such as serious illness, having a parent in hospice, or living in a shelter due to homelessness or domestic violence.

Where do the teddy bears come from and how do they get to Sojourner Place? That's where the children of Tamarack Elementary play a role. Teacher Sanada Bailey works with children in grades pre-K through second to help with the Bear Hugs Project. You see, it's not just a drive to collect teddy bears and send them out. Instead, the program teaches children the value of caring and sharing through volunteering. Helping the Bear Hugs Project provides an opportunity for children to build self-esteem and develop leadership skills working on a worthwhile service project that has a direct impact on other youth. The Bear Hugs Project recognizes that for children, learning they are part of something larger than themselves, is an important part of service learning.

The Bear Hugs Project makes the giving of a teddy bear an act of kindness that sends love and support to the recipient. It's about process as much as form.

Bridging People and Places brings bears to the school on what is fondly called, "Bear Day." Children choose a bear, determine the bear's gender and then pick a hand knit outfit and hat for the bear. Then the child hugs the bear, effectively infusing the bear with love and kindness through a bear hug. Bears are then packed up for volunteer Ginny Hanby to deliver to places like Sojourner Place and the Double H Ranch, a summer camp for children facing life-threatening illness. The dens often feature positive messages written by the children.

As Bridging People and Places explains it, "Our programs send positive messages of loving kindness; promote healing; and bring more sensitivity, cooperation, and compassion into our world."

Judging by the smiles on the faces of children at Sojourner Place who receive a teddy bear through the Bear Hugs Program, we can attest to the love, warmth and kindness the bears bring to vulnerable children at Sojourner Place.

For more on Bear Day, including photos, please visit the Unity House Facebook page. You can also visit [www.bridgingpeople.org](http://www.bridgingpeople.org) and [www.doublehbranch.org](http://www.doublehbranch.org)

## SOJOURNER PLACE COLLECTION DRIVE

If you or your group would like to help those at Sojourner Place, consider hosting a drive to collect these needed items:

- towels
- twin-sized sheets
- shampoo
- soap
- toothbrushes
- toothpaste
- razors
- feminine hygiene products
- laundry detergent



**MOHAWK HUDSON HUMANE SOCIETY**

**ONCE AGAIN, UNITY HOUSE WILL PARTICIPATE IN THE HUDSON MOHAWK HUMANE SOCIETY'S PAWS IN THE PARK WALK ON SATURDAY, JUNE 21ST AT SIENA COLLEGE CAMPUS.**

This family-friendly day raises funds for the humane society. To register, contact [www.mohawkhumane.org](http://www.mohawkhumane.org) or call us to sponsor our team (518) 274-2607.

**Saturday June 21st**  
9am — 1pm at SIENA COLLEGE

**Paws in the Park**

Did you know that 71% of pet-owning victims entering shelters reported that their batterer had injured, maimed, killed or threatened family pets for revenge or to psychologically control their victims? The MHHS is a valuable partner that fosters animals while their human companions seek safety. The services provided by MHHS are vital to the safety of the entire family!

# Upcoming Events

## with Unity House

### June 8

### Calling All Runners!



**On Sunday, June 8, runners from around the Capital Region will gather to raise awareness about Domestic Violence.** Officially called "The Run for Help in memory of Liza Ellen Warner and Nikki L. Hart", this event honors the memory of two local women who died at the hands of their former intimate partners. This family-friendly event is a 5K Race/Walk co-sponsored by **Family and Friends of Liza Ellen Warner Association, Inc. and The Nikki Hart Children's Memorial Fund.** Proceeds from the event will benefit the Domestic Violence Services Program at Unity House and the Nikki Hart Children's Memorial Fund. For more information, including a registration form, go to [www.unityhouseNY.org](http://www.unityhouseNY.org)

### June 30

### Golf for Good!



**Monday, June 30th will be a great day at Schuyler Meadows Golf Course in Loudonville.** Once again, Unity House is teaming up with Catholic Charities for a great day on the course to benefit Unity House programs and the Rensselaer County programs of Catholic Charities. Come Join Us! Jim Burr, NCAA Basketball Referee will be our Master of Ceremonies. To register, or for sponsorship information, contact Mandy Brown at [events@unityhouseNY.org](mailto:events@unityhouseNY.org) or call (518) 274-2607, x4139. Special thanks to Bill McGoldrick and Tom Dempsey for chairing this special event.



### Talkin' Turkey

Holiday food baskets are back by popular demand! **Unity House, Commission on Economic Opportunity, Capital District Community Gardens and Oakwood Community Center** are planning holiday baskets for families facing food insecurity at Thanksgiving. Holiday baskets will be available for a nominal fee and will be a grocery bag with all the Thanksgiving meal trimmings, including fresh vegetables from area farmers. Also included will be a gift certificate for a turkey or other holiday protein. An estimated 300-500 households will benefit from this fresh, healthy food.

Find us on Facebook to see how you can help at holiday time, including details on our popular Adopt a Family program.



### February 13, 2015

### Save The Date!

**We're planning a wonderful winter event! Save the date of February 13, 2015 for Unity House.** The *Have a Heart* event replaces Unity House's Harvest Supper. We are pleased to honor Valentine's Day and raise support for needed programming. Stay tuned for more details- you can keep current on Unity House happenings through our Facebook page or at [www.unityhouseNY.org](http://www.unityhouseNY.org).

# Thank You Volunteers!

April was Volunteer Month. Unity House marked the occasion by hosting a Volunteer Recognition Social where we had a chance to thank the many volunteers who lend a hand throughout Unity House.

Are you looking for a volunteer opportunity for you, your office, your service organization or faith community? Unity House considers volunteers vital to its mission of helping others and offers a range of opportunities to serve. Whether you are interested in a one-time visit or an ongoing project, Unity House can help you tailor a volunteer experience to fit your skills and schedule. Projects include short-term cleanups, meal preparation, working in offices, helping at special events and in direct service programs. Unity House holds a monthly Volunteer Information Sessions where prospective volunteers can learn about opportunities, ask questions and tour The Front Door. Each volunteer brings a different skill set and life experience to the table. At Unity House, we do our best to match volunteers with a program or project that uses their strengths. To find out when the next Volunteer Information Session is scheduled, contact our Volunteer Desk at (518) 274-2607, x4139 or [Volunteer@unityhouseNY.org](mailto:Volunteer@unityhouseNY.org)

## THANK YOU LITERACY VOLUNTEERS OF RENSSELAER COUNTY!

The remarkable readers who read to preschoolers in the Unity Sunshine Program are so loved by the children. We are grateful to all who lend a hand and consider volunteers vital to our success. For more information, contact [volunteer@unityhousesny.org](mailto:volunteer@unityhousesny.org) or call our Volunteer Desk at (518) 274-2607, x4135.

### Our Newest Partners in Caring!

Thank You Grace Fellowship for  
volunteering at Unity House!



Mary Jane Smith (center) with Diane DeVoe (right) and longtime volunteer Mary Lou Lamb (left) at the Volunteer Recognition Social.



Volunteer Coordinator, Moira Geracitano (in black shirt), enjoys the party with the volunteer crew from GE Healthcare.



Volunteer Marsha Ras enjoys the Volunteer Recognition Social with Diane Cameron Pascone of the Unity House Development Office.

To those who volunteer at Unity House- whether regularly or one time- Thank You for all you do. You help make a difference in the lives of others.



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## A Special Thank You to our Monthly Givers

**Many thanks to those who have signed on to become monthly donors. By making a monthly gift of any size to Unity House you help make a predictable income stream that makes our organization more efficient.**

You can set up a monthly gift via your bank account or your credit card. Your measured, consistent support helps us in our mission to enhance the quality of life for people in need. For more information on monthly giving or other ways to help Unity House, please contact Diane Cameron Pascone, Development Director at (518) 274-2607, 4133.

**THANK YOU** architecture<sup>+</sup>

Many thanks to our friends at Architecture+ for their support of Unity House's Basics for Babies Campaign. Frank Pitts, the partners and staff at Architecture+ have made this their ninth year of supporting this campaign that provides basic necessities to the most vulnerable among us.

## Leaving a Legacy

One of the easiest and most effective ways to leave a legacy is to make a bequest to Unity House of Troy, Inc. You can designate Unity House as a partial beneficiary of your estate, life insurance policy or donate a policy you no longer need. For more information, or a confidential conversation about other ways to make a planned gift, please call Diane Cameron Pascone a, Development Director at (518) 274-2607, x4133.



### PERSONAL CARE ITEMS NEEDED

- small sizes of shampoo
- soap
- laundry detergent
- toilet paper