



Mobile Pantry Removes Barriers, Addresses Food Insecurity

Staff from our Community Resources share about #VanLife

“These twin sisters in Rensselaer are 91 years old and they are so thankful for the van. It’s hard for them to get to the grocery store, and when they can make it, their SNAP benefits don’t go far enough. The food from our van helps them stretch their budget. And with volunteers helping on the van, there is more time to socialize with people who sometimes face isolation at home.”

“Senior citizens at the Cohoes stop have said they appreciate the convenience of our van, especially the fresh produce that volunteers stock the van with. The van can often give out adult overnight pads, a costly expense for seniors on a fixed income.”

“A recently divorced mom of four told us that the Unity House van saved her

life! Being able to supplement her food budget was great, but just as good was getting connected to other Unity House services – she was so thankful that Unity House was able to provide winter coats for her and her children.”

“We always get such a warm welcome in Hoosick Falls! The area has only one option for groceries and many have trouble accessing it, and sometimes the prices are too high. Clients are always happy to see us.”

“Berlin is a new outpost for the van. It’s great that we can supplement the current pantry in the area and we work together to not duplicate items: we supply meats, grains, and fresh produce while the fixed pantry focuses on milk, eggs, and bread.”

When the Helpers Need Help A Skilled Volunteer Steps Up

Renee Hallock has always been a helper and volunteer. With retirement from NY State’s Office of Children and Family Services, Renee had more time to give back to the causes she cares about.

As a volunteer at Unity House, Renee fills a unique role of helping staff navigate Unity House services, which are free, voluntary, and confidential. With over 400 full and part-time employees, Unity House has staff who may need to access available services. Not all staff, however, are comfortable using services, especially ones they may help provide.

All of the issues that Unity House addresses can carry stigma. For example, perhaps you are experiencing spousal abuse and need help. You know that help is available, but how do you go about accessing it at your workplace? Enter Renee, who can discreetly help a staff member navigate services in a way that meets their needs, while keeping their work life separate from their home life. It is part of Unity House’s commitment to providing services in a way that recognizes the inherent dignity of each person who walks through our doors, regardless of which door they use.

Speaking up can empower others to speak up, and having a dedicated navigator shows that our services are truly for anyone who can benefit from them. Volunteer Renee Hallock makes it possible for staff to access services securely and with confidence. In short, Renee is one of those volunteers who helps make life better every day, for the people we serve and the people who work in human services.



Connections

Spring brings a sense of renewal. As I look to the work our staff do every day at our Capital Region sites, I am proud and amazed at what they accomplish. None of it would be possible without the help of incredible volunteers who help in so many ways. When we come together, we can do great things. As Althea’s story illustrates, sometimes it takes persistence, patience, and the belief that you can make life better.



David L. Bach
Chief Executive Officer

Thanks to you, a mother facing linguistic and cultural barriers found safety for herself, and her young children

With limited English skills, “Althea” came to Unity House for help. Staff in our domestic violence services program wanted Althea to tell her story in her own words, so they utilized language translation services to learn that Althea needed help. Coming from the Middle East, Althea faced linguistic and cultural barriers, yet she knew she had to find safety from an abusive husband. The abuse had escalated and Althea feared her young children would soon become targets of their father’s controlling and abusive behavior.

At first, Althea was able to leave her abuser, but without help or the means to secure her children in a new home, she returned to her abuser. Research shows that having a safety plan is key to leaving an abusive situation. In Althea’s case, she persisted until she found a lifeline at Unity House.

With the help of Unity House staff, Althea was able to map out a future for herself and her children. Staff helped her and the kids get settled in our Transitional Housing for survivors of domestic violence. The Unity House Law Project was able to help Althea start the process of divorce. While she worked on learning a new language, Althea was also working on her citizenship, a process that had been stalled by her husband.

Abusers often control a victim by hiding important documents, in some cases jeopardizing legal paths to citizenship.

At one point, because of her abuser’s actions, Child Protective Services stepped in to ensure the safety of the children. Althea relied on the supports from Unity House staff to help resolve the case, which contributed to Althea’s own healing. Her paramount concern was her children and finding a footing for their collective future.

None of this was easy, or quick, but Althea kept moving forward. With help from Unity House, Althea found safety and stability so she and the children could thrive and be free from abuse. Althea was eventually awarded full custody and moved into stable housing, thanks to a housing subsidy from Unity House.

Today, Althea is a homeowner which is a different kind of stress. It’s one she welcomes for her and her children. Her path was not the one she imagined, but it led her to the home she always dreamed of for her children.

Your support makes a difference, strengthening families, helping individuals find and keep their footing. Please consider a gift to help people in need.

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Core Values

With passion and integrity, Unity House embraces the view that everyone deserves equal economic, political, and social rights. We work together to open doors of access and opportunity for everyone, particularly those in greatest need.

Putting the Sparkle in a Special Time of Year

The Holiday Store is a temporary shop where eligible parents can pick out new toys and necessities for their children. It's a tremendous effort that helps almost 500 families each year, who come from across Unity House programs.

One parent, we'll call her Pam, was not planning on celebrating any holidays. Pam did not have room in her budget for gifts for her 8 year old child. She was also experiencing mobility issues. There was no way Pam would be able to make it to a store and she couldn't afford what the stores were offering.

With the help of her Health Home case manager, Pam was able to have a personal shopping experience over the phone, at no cost. Through voice and video, Pam was able to see what was available for her child, who is on the spectrum. Together, Pam and her case manager picked out sensory toys, stocking stuffers, some necessities, and wrapping supplies. All of this was possible because people gave new toys, games, books, pajamas, and more to our Children's Holiday Program. Others wrote checks so we could do the shopping and many volunteered to transform a vacant space into a holiday workshop filled with new items.

They say many hands make light work and that is certainly the case for Pam and her child, who had a true holiday celebration thanks to your support.



Thank you!

To the many helpers who made our **Children's Holiday Program** a success, thank you. With your support, we were able to help 1,561 children at holiday time, providing needs and fulfilling wishes. Your caring generosity helps relieve the stress of parents and our staff who work with them. You are making life better in so many ways.

"It's always striking to me to see the difference volunteers make possible, especially at holiday time."

-Moir Geracitano,
Program Coordinator

Making Life Better, One Month at a Time

Chris and Kathi Burke are familiar with the work of Unity House.

Now retired, the couple spent their careers helping others. Kathi was a dedicated speech pathologist helping children, and Chris was the longest tenured CEO of Unity House before retiring in 2022.

Leaving Unity House did not mean leaving behind the generous support the Burke household has always given to Unity House. Chris and Kathi consistently made monthly donations to Unity House. They continue to support Unity House and other causes dear to them now that they are retired.

As Chris explains, "I know how important regular donations are to charities, both as reliable revenue and to be able to maintain resilience and meet the needs of the people they serve." Chris knows the difference that services such as a hot meal or access to the food pantry can make for someone. "Those services often serve as a bridge to other services, meaning people can be helped with multiple issues," he says.

Setting up a recurring donation, either monthly or quarterly, is a great way to plan support for the programs you care about.

Today, Chris and Kathi are busy enjoying their new full time gig: being grandparents. They still prioritize helping others, through recurring donations. Steadfast support of donors like Chris and Kathi that helps make life better for the people who come to Unity House in need.

To learn more about setting up a recurring donation, contact **Stefanie Bastien** at Sbastien@unityhousesny.org or call (518) 274-2633, x4133



"I like the convenience of recurring donations. I set it and forget it: payroll takes care of my contribution and I can see on my paystub the amount I am donating each pay period. It's not a lot but at the end of the year, I see how it adds up."

-Unity House staffer

Volunteer

Helpers are vital to our mission! Across Unity House sites, volunteers help make life better. Learn more about volunteer opportunities on site and off:



A Child's Place



Domestic and Sexual Violence Services



Food Pantry and Unity on the Move, our mobile pantry



Kitchen & Community Meal



Toiletries Collection



Food Drives



Outdoor Cleanups