# Unity House Connections

*Making Life Better*

As the holiday season approaches, we are grateful for the generosity and compassion that make stories like this possible. The journey shared here is a powerful reminder that a single act of kindness can have a lasting impact, inspiring hope not only in the moment but for years to come.

During this season of gratitude and giving, I am continually inspired by the generosity of those who support our mission. Every day, Unity House helps individuals and families find safety, stability, opportunity, and hope through a wide range of programs and services.

Thank you for being part of the Unity House community. Your compassion and partnership make meaningful change possible and help ensure that support is available to those who need it most.

David L. Bach
Chief Executive Officer

## *"That Christmas became a turning point in our lives"*

**When I think back on my childhood, I am reminded that some of life's greatest blessings often arrive during our most difficult moments.** The support my family received through Unity House and its Holiday Program not only helped us through challenging times, but also planted the seeds of hope, faith, and generosity that continue to guide my life today.

My journey with Unity House has come full circle. As a child, my family received support during some of the most difficult years of our lives. Today, I am blessed to give back to the same Holiday Program that once gave my mother hope and helped create joyful memories for my brothers and me.

**Can you tell us what life was like when your family first received support from the Holiday Program?** *Trying or challenging would be an understatement. It's important to understand that Unity House played a significant role in my life long before the Holiday Program. They helped my mother, my two younger brothers, and me escape a violent domestic situation. I was first introduced to Unity House in 1986 when we lived in one of their shelters for approximately six to eight months. We celebrated Christmas there alongside other families. Then in 1988, we became recipients of the Holiday Program's generosity, which made a tremendous difference in our lives.*

**How old were you, and what do you remember most about receiving help during the holidays?** *I was 8 years old. My mother was working two jobs while putting herself through college to create a better life for our family. As the oldest of three children, I remember being there when the gifts were delivered. I helped my mom wrap and hide them from my younger brothers. It felt like we had won the lottery. More than anything, I remember the sense of relief on my mother's face and seeing her smile.*

**Do you have a specific memory from those holiday seasons that has stayed with you over the years?** *I remember the excitement my brothers and I felt receiving simple gifts like coloring books, new socks, pajamas, and toys. But more than any specific item, I remember the feeling of being blessed. My mother often referred to those gifts as coming from "angels of mercy," and that phrase has stayed with me throughout my life.*

**What did the Holiday Program mean to you and your family at that time?** *At that time, the Holiday Program meant everything to our family. My brothers were only four and three years old, so they don't remember it the way I do. For a single mother working tirelessly to provide a normal holiday experience for her children, that support was truly invaluable.*

**Looking back, how did receiving support affect you and your family?** *It gave our family the hope we needed to keep moving forward and building a better life, and I do believe the program helped my mother teach and build values in each of us.*

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**Did that experience influence the way you think about helping others today?** *Absolutely. That experience helped shape the way I interact with and support others today. It restored hope and faith for my mother during a difficult time and reinforced the generosity she already possessed. That Christmas became a turning point in our lives and taught me that blessings are meant to be shared. Since then, I have tried to live by the principle of paying kindness and generosity forward whenever I can.*

**What values or lessons did you take away from that experience?** *Being able to help another fellow human reaps more than you can imagine. Especially with being able to empathically know and understand what someone in true need is trying to overcome. I value being generous with all i do. Generous in faith, support, and my heart. I always try my hardest to connect deeply in all of my relationships I make in this life.*

**What inspired you to become a donor to the same program that once helped your family?** *There was never any doubt in my mind that if I were ever in a position to give back, I would. When the opportunity arose, I shared the program with my employees and talked about ways we could help a family in need. I am fortunate to work with an amazing group of people who share those same values. They are more like family than coworkers.*

*When I told them about the program, they immediately wanted to help, and together we were able to support a family in a meaningful way.*

**Why is supporting the Holiday Program personally meaningful to you?** *Having experienced a difficult start in life gives me a unique perspective. I understand the difference between wants and genuine needs because I've lived it. Supporting the Holiday Program is meaningful to me because it provides something even more valuable than material gifts. It gives families hope, and hope can be life-changing.*

Julie Schoonbeck

*Julie Schoonbeck lives in the Capital Region with her husband and two cats. With nearly 30 years of experience in the financial industry, she is the Director of Mortgage Servicing at OwnersChoice Funding, Inc. Julie feels fortunate to have built a career where helping people is at the heart of what she does.*

**What does it mean to you to have come full circle, from recipient to donor?** *I have been and am currently Blessed. It means so much for my family to be able to* ***PAY IT FORWARD.*** *And we teach our next generation the same.*

**How does it feel to now be in a position to help other children and families create special holiday memories?** *I love to help people in any way I can. Being supported in my greatest time of need, I am so lucky to be able to give back and help someone else realize the world needs them and there is good in everyone.*

**What do you hope families who receive support today experience during the holiday season?** Peace, Joy and Hope. Strength to keep progressing forward.

**If you could say something directly to a child receiving support this year, what would it be?** *Merry Christmas! Always remember this feeling and its okay to receive blessings. You can always pass them on.*

**If you could speak to the donors who supported your family when you were a child, what would you say?** *I would tell them that I hope they have been as blessed as they blessed others. Thank you will never feel like enough. The generosity they showed our family gave us more than gifts. It gave us relief, hope, joy, and the ability to finally breathe a little easier during a very difficult time.*

**What would you say to someone considering supporting the Holiday Program for the first time?** *Do it, don't second-guess it. This program really allows turning points for families losing hope or struggling. You will feel great joy doing it as well. Becoming "Santa" is one of the best feelings!*

**When you reflect on your journey from receiving holiday support as a child to giving back today, what are you most grateful for?** *I am most grateful for the kindness that changed the course of my family's life. Those acts of generosity shaped my faith, my values, and my commitment to helping others. Today, being able to give back to the same program that once helped us is both a privilege and a blessing.*

# Making Holiday MAGIC Happen

**The impact of a holiday gift can last long after the season ends.** For more than 1,500 children across Unity House programs, the Children's Holiday Program has helped to bring joy during a time when families may need it most.

There are so many ways to be part of the magic. Supporters can shop for a child using their personalized wish list, donate new toys and essentials, host a toy drive with friends or make a financial gift to the Holiday Program.

What may look like a room filled with toys, books, blankets, and pajamas represents a community making sure every child feels remembered and celebrated.

Children's HOLIDAY unity house Program

**HELP MAKE THE HOLIDAYS BRIGHTER FOR 1,500 CHILDREN IN OUR COMMUNITY**

For more information please reach out to Moira
mgeracitano@unityhouseny.org
518-274-2633 ext. 4135

**Scan here for more information, registry links and to donate online.**

# Working Together

This November, Unity House is joining forces with the Commission on Economic Opportunity and Capital Roots to provide Thanksgiving food packages to neighbors in need. **As SNAP cuts put additional strain on individuals and families already struggling to make ends meet, the need for food assistance continues to grow.** By working together, we can help our neighbors have food on their tables this Thanksgiving and beyond.

To donate or volunteer, contact our Development Team at **518-274-2607,** or make a gift to our food programs.

**Help our Food Programs directly by scanning here to donate.**

# Raising Awareness, Supporting Survivors

October was Domestic Violence Awareness Month, a time to increase understanding, highlight resources, and recognize the importance of creating safer communities.

At Unity House, this commitment extends throughout the year and is a critical part of our work. Through our Domestic Violence Services, we provide support and advocacy while working to ensure each person is met with dignity, compassion, and respect.

We kicked off the month with our annual free Community Block Party, bringing together neighbors and local organizations for an afternoon of connection.

While October brings greater attention to domestic violence, our efforts to raise awareness and support survivors continue year round.

Together, we can help build a community where everyone feels supported, heard, and safe.

# Services Offered by Unity House

**Unity House provides a wide range of compassionate, community-based services to individuals and families in need, including:**

**Scan to explore programs and services**

### Community Resources
- Online Food Pantry
- Mobile Pantry
- ReStyle Thrift Store
- Housing Support and Legal Advocacy
- Emergency Assistance
- And more

### Transitional Housing and Support Services
- Community Residences offer a structured, supportive environment for adults living with mental illness, with 24/7 staff support.
- Transitional Apartment Services provides safe, secure furnished apartments and case management to adults living with mental illness.
- Entitlements Coordination and Mental Health Nursing Services offered to those enrolled in Housing and Support Services programs.
- Crisis/Hospital Diversion Bed co-located in one of the Community Residence sites.

### Domestic and Sexual Violence Services
- Crisis intervention and support
- Enhanced safety planning
- Emergency shelter
- Case management and specialty services
- 24-hour hotline
- And more

### Northeast Career Planning
- AccesVR
- OPWDD
- PROS
- Supported Education
- School to Work
- And more

### Law Project
UHLP provides civil legal services to victims of domestic violence and low-income residents of Rensselaer County in custody, child support, orders of protection, divorce, landlord/tenant, and other civil matters.

### A Child's Place
- Special education and therapy services
- Early intervention services
- Child care for children ages 6 weeks to 5 years

### Clinical Services
- Assertive Community Treatment (ACT) for adults living with severe and persistent mental illness in home and community settings
- Critical Time Intervention (CTI) for care management during major life transitions
- Behavioral Health Services: Outpatient clinic providing therapy and medication services

### Permanent Housing and Support Services
- Supportive Housing for those with mental illness or living with HIV/AIDS
- Supportive Housing for homeless adults/families living with a mental illness
- Social Determinants of Health Support Services for those living with HIV/AIDS
- Health Home Care Management Services
- Young Adult/MICA Case Management Services

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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.