



Volunteers
of America®
UPSTATE NEW YORK

VOLUNTEERS OF AMERICA UPSTATE NEW YORK NEWSLETTER - WINTER 2026

Celebrating 130 Years of Volunteers of America

For 130 years, Volunteers of America has shown up in the moments that matter most. What began in 1896 as a movement rooted in compassion has grown into a vital source of housing, care, and support throughout Upstate New York. As we honor this milestone, we celebrate both our rich history and the difference being made every day.

VOA's founders Maud and Ballington Booth began their early work advocating for the rights of those who were exiting the criminal justice system, supporting people experiencing poverty, and going wherever they were needed. Today, VOA Upstate New York serves more than 10,000 people each year through housing and shelter, early childhood education, reentry services, and efforts to address food insecurity. These programs are designed to meet the evolving needs of the communities we serve and deliver meaningful results.

Historical Timeline

- **1896** - Volunteers of America founded by social reformers Maud and Ballington Booth.
- **1900s** First shelter for homeless individuals opens in Rochester.
- **1930s** - Establishes food/clothing distribution and vocational training programs during the Great Depression.
- **1987** - Child care programs open in Rochester.
- **1995** - VOA programs in Monroe and Broome County join together.
- **1997** - Residential Reentry Center opens in Rochester.
- **2008** - First family shelter opens.
- **2016** - Cobblestone Place opens housing for older adults.
- **2020** - Keeps all programs open and operating throughout COVID.
- **2023** - Opens The Farm to address food insecurity.
- **2024** - Moving Forward Family Shelter opens.
- **2025** - Expand shelter services into Tompkins County.

"By combining our long-standing legacy with modern approaches, we continue to tackle the complex challenges facing our communities."
- Dr. Junior Dillion, President and CEO



Last year, VOA ensured that more than 1,200 individuals and families had safe, stable housing, provided child care and early childhood education for more than 130 children, and helped more than 100 men and women make a positive transition back into the community after leaving incarceration.

In total, we provided more than 182,000 nights of shelter and 150,000 meals to those in need, and our hydroponic farm distributed more than 2,220 donations of fresh produce to clients and food banks across the community.

Stories like Aisha's (see page 2) put faces to the numbers, showing the real-life difference VOA makes every day. Every success is the result of the community working together, including staff, donors, and partners, whose dedication makes positive change possible.

As we move into the next decade, VOA continues to restore dignity, hope, and a sense of belonging for people facing challenges. Efforts are underway to expand long-term housing solutions that help individuals rebuild stability and self-reliance. We hope you will join us in our celebration.



Holiday toy drive exceeds goal thanks to generous donors



The holidays were brighter for children staying in VOA's emergency family shelters. Thanks to the overwhelming generosity of our community, this year's holiday toy drive exceeded expectations. We surpassed our initial goal with an estimated 900 toys donated.

We are especially grateful to our many corporate and community partners who participated, as well as countless individual donors, whose generosity helped make this year's holiday toy drive a success.

A special thank you to the Barnes family, who for more than 20 years have continued their cherished tradition of distributing toys to students at the VOA's Children's Center, bringing extra joy and smiles to children each holiday season.

From all of us at VOA, thank you to everyone who gave, hosted a drive, or helped spread the word. Your support reminds us of the power of our community coming together to bring hope, joy, and belonging to families in need.

Little Free Library spreads love of reading

Books and imagination came to life as preschoolers at the VOA Children's Center celebrated the opening of a new Little Free Library this fall. This library is one of 25 special Narnia-themed Little Free Libraries awarded nationwide through the Little Free Library Impact Library Program, in partnership with HarperCollins Children's Books, to commemorate the 75th anniversary of *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* by C. S. Lewis.

"We're thrilled to offer a space where children, parents, and neighbors can come together, share stories, and build a stronger community around a shared love of reading," said Community Engagement Manager Elyse Jones.

The library will serve children and families at the VOA Children's Center, and is open to the public, encouraging all community members to "take a book, share a book."



Aisha's Story

As a single parent with a newborn, Aisha* turned to Volunteers of America for support during a critical time in the face of uncertainty. VOA's Rapid ReHousing Program found safe housing for Aisha and her child, providing temporary rental assistance, and helped her move from day-to-day survival to being able to focus on her long-term goals.

With a roof over their head, Aisha returned to cosmetology school determined to pursue a career she loved, and successfully earned her licensing.

Along the way, VOA connected Aisha to essential community resources, such as food, clothing, and toys for her daughter, ensuring she had the support she needed to thrive. Upon graduating from VOA's program, she was ready to build a brighter future for her family showing how housing, paired with the right support, can open the door to lasting stability and new opportunity.



*Client name changed and stock photo used to protect privacy.

Code Blue shelters brings people in from the cold

As temperatures continue to fall, Volunteers of America is working to ensure no one faces winter without safety or support.

VOA officially opened a new Code Blue shelter in Ithaca in partnership with Tompkins County on November 24, in order to meet an urgent community need. In addition to warm beds at night, the site operates as a daytime warming center offering case management to help individuals find more permanent housing options and access support services.

In Broome County, our Code Blue program continues to run at full capacity at our Binghamton shelter. Across both communities, Code Blue is more than a seasonal service but an important lifeline. So far this year, we've served more than 90 men and women, providing safety, warmth, and hope when it's needed most.



The Home Depot Foundation awards VOA grant for safety upgrades at Chenango Street

VOA was honored to receive a \$75,000 grant from The Home Depot Foundation to support renovations at our Chenango Street residence in Binghamton. This supportive housing program serves families overcoming homelessness, including veteran-led households. Safe, well-maintained housing is critical for families working to rebuild their lives,

The grant funded the replacement of exterior stairs and decking as part of ongoing efforts to maintain high-quality housing that promotes long-term stability and independence, ensuring the building's longevity to serve veterans and their families for years to come.



Social Care Network provides more resources

Residents and families served by Volunteers of America now have even more support at their fingertips. VOA has joined the Social Care Network through a partnership with Forward Leading IPA's WeLinkCare program in the Finger Lakes region and Care Compass Collaborative in the Southern Tier.

This program is a statewide effort to provide more coordinated and comprehensive services for individuals struggling with serious health conditions, as well as those facing housing, food, and financial insecurity. It helps people become stabilized in housing and connected with healthcare while providing improved access to basic needs, including food, furnishings, and transportation assistance.

"Through this program, VOA can provide expanded supportive services combined with rental assistance, utility deposits, food, and funds to help people get to health care and work, which makes it possible for some of the most vulnerable people in our community to strengthen their health and financial well-being," explains Sara Martone, Director of VOA's Supportive Housing Programs.





6th Annual Gala

April 16, 2026

5:30 - 8 p.m.

Harro East Ballroom.

Celebrate the 130th anniversary
of Volunteers of America.

Join us in exploring the
past, present, and future
possibilities of VOA.

Sponsorships are available now,
and tickets on sale soon.

voaupny.org/gala



Van Bortel Subaru donates new winter coats



More than 250 brand-new winter coats found their way into the hands of children at the VOA Children's Center and our emergency family shelter thanks to Van Bortel Subaru and Operation Warm.

This marks the third year of this partnership, bringing confidence, warmth, and comfort to children and supporting their well-being during the coldest months of the year.



214 Lake Avenue
Rochester, NY 14608

Maud Booth Giving Society

We are excited to introduce the Maud Booth Giving Society, a special circle recognizing supporters whose sustaining gifts strengthen our ability to respond to community needs. Our new giving society honors the legacy of VOA's co-founder, Maud Booth, a tireless advocate for dignity, compassion, and justice for people facing hardships. This society celebrates individuals who share that commitment and choose to invest in long-term, transformative change through their philanthropic support.



Maud Booth
GIVING SOCIETY

Supporters may join the Maud Booth Giving Society in ways that fit their giving goals, from monthly gifts or annual contributions of at least \$130 in honor of VOA's 130th anniversary.

Be part of Maud Booth's legacy and join a dedicated circle of supporters helping to restore hope, foster stability, and strengthen communities. We look forward to building a community of supporters who believe, as Maud Booth did, that lasting change begins with compassion put into action.

To support VOA go to voaupny.org/donate.