Spirit

VOA UPSTATE NEW YORK

VOA UPSTATE NEW YORK NEWSLETTER - FALL 2026

## Volunteers of America rebrands to VOA with new look

When Volunteers of America was founded in 1896, the word volunteer carried a different meaning. It referred to individuals who chose service as a vocation and a calling to make a difference in the lives of others. Over time, however, the modern understanding of volunteerism evolved, creating confusion about the nature and scope of our work.

With that history in mind, Volunteers of America has officially rebranded to VOA, a change that reflects how the organization is known today while addressing a longstanding misconception that its services are primarily delivered by volunteers.

As part of this transition, VOA Upstate New York is joining the national office and 29 other affiliates across the country in adopting the VOA name and brand. The change creates a more unified identity that strengthens recognition, visibility, and understanding of our work nationwide while maintaining the local presence and services people know and trust.

While the name and visual identity are changing, our programs, services, leadership, and commitment to supporting individuals and families, strengthening communities, and creating pathways to hope, stability, and opportunity remain unchanged.

United under one VOA brand, we are better positioned to tell our story, amplify our impact, and advance our mission in communities across the country.

## Dr. Dillion recognized in City & State's Above & Beyond in Social Service awards

Dr. Junior Dillion was named in the 2026 City & State New York's Above & Beyond: Social Services list, recognizing leaders who have dedicated their careers to making New York a better, safer place through their work in the social service sector.



A champion for public policy and community collaboration, Dr. Dillion regularly engages stakeholders and policymakers to elevate issues affecting underserved populations. Under Dr. Dillion's guidance, VOA has increased its capacity to serve people across Upstate New York through expanded shelter services, innovative programming, and continued growth into new communities.

## Cobblestone Place celebrates 10 Years





Since opening its doors 10 years ago, VOA's Cobblestone Place in Webster has been more than just a 60-unit affordable apartment community. It is where residents can age in place with dignity in a welcoming environment designed for adults age 62 and older.

As communities across the country face growing challenges related to housing affordability, access to stable housing remains especially important for older adults living on fixed incomes.

Developed in partnership with Conifer Realty, Cobblestone Place includes 18 specialized units for older adults who need additional support services to continue living independently. VOA provides on-site services and activities for residents.

Now, in its tenth year, Cobblestone Place continues to foster connection and community through resident activities, gatherings, and shared experiences that bring neighbors together.

## Hike to End Homelessness raises awareness











As housing affordability and homelessness continue to impact individuals and families across our region, 100 community members gathered at St. John Fisher University on Sunday, September 13 for a family-friendly community walk, which raised more than $10,000 to support programs and services for individuals and families facing housing instability.

Many people that are in need of housing support come to VOA for assistance due to situations out of their control. That's where VOA comes in with a continuum of housing options to meet the needs of the communities we serve.

Special thank you to our sponsors: Community Bank, Eidlin-Kilmer & Associates, LaBella Associates, Cushman & Wakefield Pyramid Brokerage Co., Everblak Paving, Healthcare Education Project, Latina Boulevard Foods, NBT Bank, ProNexus, LLC , Bank of America, and Summit Federal Credit Union.

We'd also like to thank St. John Fisher University, and all of our event's participants, donors, volunteers, staff, and board members whose generosity and support helped make the Hike to End Homelessness a success.








## Operation Backpack® delivers supplies to more than 300 students to start the school year off right

The start of school can be especially challenging for families facing housing insecurity or financial hardship. Supply costs have seen a substantial increase over last year, forcing some parents to choose between school supplies and essential items, such as groceries.

Operation Backpack® is a national VOA initiative to fill in the gap for children experiencing homelessness and poverty. Thanks to the generosity of individual donors, local businesses, and additional foundation support, VOA collected and distributed more than 335 backpacks filled with school supplies to children staying at VOA's emergency family shelters and housing programs in Monroe, Broome, and Tomkins counties. VOA also distributed backpacks to school-age children served by our Children's Center in Rochester.



"I'm thankful for VOA bringing my kids backpacks. It's going to take a lot of stress off me," said Cecely Lozano, a VOA client and mother to six. "Last year we had to ask for help from family members, and they didn't even have everything they needed for the first day of school, so for them to have their backpacks and school supplies already it means a lot."

No kid should go to school empty-handed. A backpack filled with school supplies may seem small, but can provide a sense of stability and dignity during a difficult time.

VOA's Operation Backpack® ensures children have the tools they need to succeed academically.

## VOA Children's Center expands UPK and welcomes new students

The start of a new school year is always an exciting time at the VOA Children's Center, and this year, in order to meet the growing need for high-quality early childhood education, we have expanded our Universal PreK program from four classrooms to seven classrooms.




This expansion, in partnership with Rochester City School District, reflects our ongoing commitment to ensuring young learners have access to safe, nurturing environments. Not only does high-quality UPK experiences help develop the skills they need to thrive and prepare children for kindergarten, but sets them up for lifelong learning.



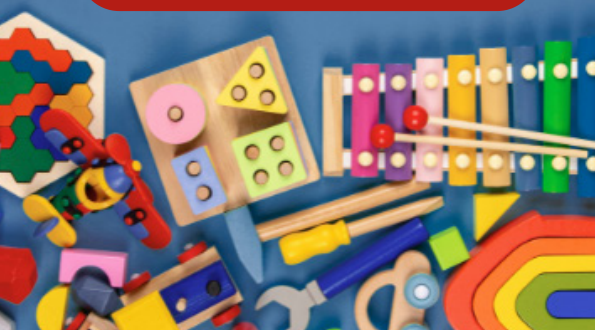

## Holiday Toy Drive

As the holiday season approaches, VOA is preparing to support children and families staying in our emergency shelters.

Through our annual Holiday Toy Drive, we collect new, unwrapped toys to help ensure children have gifts to open during the holidays.

Businesses and organizations can host an in person drive or toys can be donated through our online digital toy drive.

**To Donate:**
roonga.com/voaupnytoydrive2026



Volunteers of America
of Western New York
214 Lake Avenue
Rochester, NY 14608

## Caring Gifts

VOA's mission isn't just to provide housing, but to foster self-reliance and stability. Our programs and services are structured to help people stay housed, employed, and connected to our community. That kind of lasting change begins with a caring gift from someone like you.



This year has brought its share of challenges for those experiencing a housing crisis or food insecurity. In uncertain times, the simple act of caring becomes even more powerful.

Give today:
voaupny.org/caringgifts

Every caring gift helps VOA shelter families, care for children, serve healthy meals, and offer support where it's needed to restore hope and dignity. This is the time of year when compassion matters most. If you've been meaning to give before the year ends, now is the moment.

