

Strengthening our mission and path forward in 2025.

As we enter a new year, Volunteers of America continues our dedication to tackling the social issues of homelessness and poverty that remain as relevant today as they were nearly 130 years ago when Volunteers of America was first founded. The agency has initiated a new strategic plan and updated mission statement: “At Volunteers of America, we are dedicated to restoring hope, dignity, and a sense of belonging for people facing challenges. Our mission is to foster self-reliance and stability by delivering essential services in housing, education, and health.”

Today’s world presents many challenges, including an affordable housing crisis, rising homelessness, educational disparities, and a growing need for mental health support. To address these these complex issues, VOA strives to provide holistic services that meet all of the needs of those we serve.

Our updated mission renews our commitment and evolving approach to VOA programs and services designed to make a lasting impact on the lives of individuals facing life’s toughest challenges. Whether it’s providing housing for families in crisis, educational support for children, or health resources for those struggling with addiction or mental health, our focus is on delivering practical solutions that work.



“Each word in our new mission statement is intentional,” said Dr. Junior Dillion, President and CEO. “Hope, dignity, and belonging are at the core of our approach because we believe every person deserves to feel valued and supported. And by focusing on self-reliance and stability, we aim to empower individuals to build strong foundations for the future.”

VOA Upstate New York served more than 10,000 individuals, and now, looking ahead, this mission will guide our efforts as we tackle the challenges of 2025 and beyond. With the support of our staff, volunteers, and community partners, we will remain a trusted resource for those who turn to us in their time of need.

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Joyful holidays thanks to generous hearts.



Thanks to the generous hearts in our community, this holiday season was filled with warmth, joy, and countless smiles!

This year's toy drive received more than 300 toys for the children staying in VOA's emergency family shelters. This is in thanks to community partners including Canandaigua National Bank & Trust, The Pirate Toy Fund, the Corn Hill Neighborhood Association, Joanne and Charles Chada, and other individual donors.

In addition, Santa made a special appearance at the VOA Children's Center, and provided gifts for the 200 infants, toddlers, and preschoolers thanks to incredible generosity of the Barnes family.

The Farm introduces workforce development and agri-therapy for veterans.

The Farm at VOA has recently expanded its programming, developing a 6-week workforce development curriculum designed for individuals reentering the job market. In addition, The Farm is providing agri-therapy opportunities for veterans struggling with mental health challenges.

The new programs offer hands-on learning of all aspects of hydroponic farming including climate control, seeding, planting, harvesting, produce packaging, and managing a farm.



TEDx Talk: "Starting Last and Finishing First."

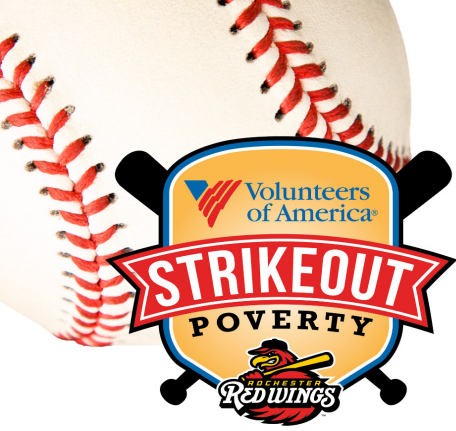
This past September, Dr. Junior Dillion, President and CEO of VOA Upstate New York, spoke at TEDxNazarethUniversity, sharing his story of resilience and his inspiring journey from growing up in an underserved community to leading a nonprofit that impacts thousands.

Dr. Dillion emphasized that success is rarely straightforward; rather, it's a series of small steps supported by others. "Starting last and finishing first really means being the best representation of yourself," he said. "Sometimes it takes others to help bring that out in us."

Now at VOA, Dr. Dillion leads a team dedicated to creating meaningful change by investing in others, lifting entire communities, and empowering future generations to succeed.

WATCH THE FULL VIDEO
voaupny.org/tedx-talk





Striking Out Poverty at Red Wings Game.

On August 2, VOA's Chief Financial Officer, Allis Marion, threw the first pitch at Innovative Field to spread awareness for *Strike Out Poverty*.

Every time a Red Wings pitcher threw a strike-out, a donation was made to directly support VOA's programs and services. Even though baseball is over, you can still donate to by visiting voaupny.org/strikeoutpoverty.

A special thank you to **Citizens** for being our 2024 Strike Out Poverty sponsor.

Staff Spotlight: Sharifa Whitt, VOACC Director.



Sharifa Whitt brings 25 years of experience in early childhood education as the new VOA Children's Center Director. A proud graduate of Howard University with a Master's Degree in Education, her journey has included roles as a teacher, manager,

director, and founder of her own educational development consulting agency.

In her previous role as CEO, Sharifa worked with young girls at FIGHT Village in Rochester, providing afterschool care focused on STEM and leadership empowerment. Her passion lies in creating opportunities that empower children to dream, explore, and succeed. Sharifa is dedicated to fostering the growth of each child and building a vibrant learning community where children thrive.

Golfing "fore" a cause.

Although September may feel like a distant memory, the success of VOA's 22nd annual charity golf tournament on September 9, 2024, continues to inspire us as we enter the new year. Held at the beautiful Locust Hill Country Club, the event brought together golfers united by a common cause of supporting VOA's mission to empower individuals and families across our community.

Even when lightning brought the tournament to an early end, it couldn't dampen the spirit of our participants from making the most of the day. Thanks to the generosity of those who attended and contributed, we raised an incredible \$83,000! This funding directly benefit VOA's life-changing programs and services. Whether providing shelter and housing, offering after-school care at the Children's Center, or delivering critical support services, every dollar raised helps make a lasting impact.

As we look ahead to this year, mark your calendars for Monday, September 8, 2025 and join us once again at Locust Hill Country Club for another exciting day of golf, community, and giving back. We hope to see familiar faces and new participants joining us to continue this meaningful tradition!



Thank you to our 2024 Eagle Sponsors:



Six ways you can support VOA (besides direct giving).

While financial contributions are essential to maintaining VOA's program and services, here are six other ways to support VOA and make a meaningful impact on the community:

1 Hold a Donation Drive for new personal hygiene products for residents staying in our shelters.



2 Donate a Vehicle schedule free and convenient pick-up by calling 1-833-300-5737.



3 Support an Event

Buy tickets, donate auction items, sponsor, or joining a planning committee!



4 Planned Giving Include VOA in your estate planning to leave a lasting legacy for future generations.



5 Tell a Friend about the important work we're doing in the community.



6 Follow us on Social Media Like and follow us on Facebook, Instagram, X, or LinkedIn.



Ready to help? For all the ways you can support Volunteers of America visit voaupny.org/help.



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214 Lake Avenue
Rochester, NY 14608



5TH ANNUAL VOLUNTEERS OF AMERICA BENEFIT

Be the Light

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“Be the Light” for brighter futures.

Join Volunteers of America for the 5th annual VOA benefit and silent auction on March 6, 2025 from 5:30-8 p.m. at the Harro East Ballroom. Be the light for brighter futures as we come together for an evening of good fun, great food, specialty drinks, and live music to support VOA's vital work in illuminating the path for those in need towards self-reliance.

Tickets and sponsorships are now available. Online silent auction will run February 28-March 6. More information can be found at voaupny.org/gala. We hope to see you there!