



20th Anniversary Luncheon



Reflecting, celebrating, and looking ahead to the next 20 years!

December 5, 2025 | Samuel's Grande Manor | Williamsville, NY

Pillars of Homeless Service Awardees



Grant Babcock

Community Missions of Niagara Frontier, Inc

I want to thank HAWNY for this recognition but it is our community that is filled with so many people that spend countless hours helping others with their day to day struggles that deserve the spotlight. Both my grandfather and father were Methodist ministers and while that was not my career path it instilled in me the desire to help. I was at a Niagara University function several years ago and a former shelter guest came up to me with a big smile. She wanted to let me know that she was still in the apartment that my son and I had helped her move into over a year before and that she was now working full time at NU. This is what makes our time spent not work but instead a Mission. A Mission of hope. Things certainly have changed in my 30+ years when the government felt it's role was to line people up and give them a block of cheese. Now churches, organizations, and advocates such as HAWNY have created strong networks that as a team help advance services to those in our community. A special thanks to all the people that work so hard to make a difference.

Pillars of Homeless Service Awardees

I have chosen to serve my community for over 20 years because I desire to share the love of my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. His Word reminds me that “whatever I do for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, I do for Christ” (Matthew 25:40). That scripture lives in my heart. Every time I step into a shelter, every time I offer a meal, a prayer, or a listening ear, I am not just serving people — I am serving Christ Himself. God’s love compels me. “Let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth” (1 John 3:18). My hands have become instruments of His compassion, His mercy, and His grace. In the faces of the broken, the forgotten, and the overlooked, I see God’s children. Scripture tells us that He is “close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit” (Psalm 34:18), and it is an honor to be a messenger of that closeness. Through these years, this work has not always been easy. There have been moments of fatigue and heartache. But when I felt weak, His Word reminded me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is made perfect in weakness” (2 Corinthians 12:9). In those moments, I was strengthened to continue. Jesus came “to seek and to save the lost” (Luke 19:10), and in serving those experiencing many different forms of lack, I am walking in His footsteps. This is my calling. This is my ministry. This is my worship. I ALSO HONOR MY MOTHER MERCIANNA, MY FATHER LARRY, MY SON DORIAN AND MY GRANDSON BABY DORIAN'S LEGACY BY GIVING BACK IN THEIR MEMORIES. It is not just something I do — it is who God has shaped me to be. For as long as I have breath, I will continue to serve, love, and testify through my actions that “The Lord is good to all; He has compassion on all He has made” (Psalm 145:9).



Maria Dockery

The Salvation Army

Pillars of Homeless Service Awardees



Norman Felschow

Community Missions of Niagara Frontier, Inc

I am very honored and humbled today to receive the Pillars of Homeless Service Award. When I think about accomplishments and what motivates me to continue 30 plus years working with our homeless population, I think of a movie that I am sure we have all seen, "The Wizard of Oz". In order for Dorothy to return home she had to click her heels together and say "There is no place like Home". As providers and servers of our homeless, we don't click our heels but we open the door for them providing a safe and warm place to live. Our team at Community Missions finds it rewarding when we find a suitable placement for them. When all the hard work is done in the shelter and we are moving a person that was once homeless to their new apartment or home, it's priceless to see their smile and joy because their journey begins and they now can say "There is no place like Home."

Pillars of Homeless Service Awardees

John has dedicated over 30 years to serving homeless and runaway youth in WNY, and his passion, leadership, and unwavering commitment continue to shape the heart of Compass House. We are incredibly lucky, and deeply grateful, to have John guiding our organization and inspiring our mission every day.



John Ferby

Compass House

Pillars of Homeless Service Awardees



Melissa Figini
Transitional Services, Inc.

For more than fifty years, Transitional Services, Inc. has operated Emergency Housing Services to support individuals living with serious mental illness who are experiencing homelessness. Our long-standing mission has been to empower our residents to develop their fullest potential, and achieve stability, safety, and greater independence. I am proud to have contributed to this mission for the past 23 years. During my tenure, I have had the privilege of working alongside a committed team of professionals who strive every day to create meaningful change in the lives of those we serve. Together, we have created a program that fosters therapeutic relationships and upholds the organizations values of respect and inclusion.

Pillars of Homeless Service Awardees

I started working at Compass House in 1988. Janell Wilson was the Executive Director at that time. She had such a passion for working with homeless youth that it was contagious. I truly believe she is the reason I fell in love with this population. 37 years and three positions later, I am the current Executive Director. My favorite days are those when previous clients come in to tell us how they are doing and how we helped them. When you help someone who is 14 years old, you do not know what a lasting impact our services will have on them. This is why I love when they come in and share. I am a member of the New York State Runaway and Homeless Youth Committee which is responsible for making policies and changes to all the New York State RHY programs. I have truly enjoyed my years here.



Lisa Freeman

Compass House

Pillars of Homeless Service Awardees



Nyla Gaylord

United Way

Nyla Gaylord has devoted more than four decades to human services, driven by a deep commitment to helping people whom systems often overlook. Beginning her career in 1980 with Rural New York Farmworker Opportunities—now PathStone—where she worked with migrant farmworkers. Subsequent jobs included working with refugees, older workers, displaced homemakers, people with disabilities, and individuals facing addiction, unemployment, and mental health challenges. Across every role, she saw a constant truth: people cannot address employment, health, or recovery without a safe place to stay. Housing advocacy has undergirded her work, even when it wasn't in her job description. A defining early moment came early on in her career when she fought for emergency shelter for a migrant family forced from their labor camp. After exhausting all options, she confronted the farmer directly—learning, in that moment, the power of advocacy and “good trouble.” She credits colleagues like Velma Smith for shaping her stance on advocacy, and belief that no client should be “jerked around” or denied help for which they were entitled. In recent years, Nyla has led community-wide efforts in Orleans County to address the shortage of housing and rising homelessness. Following the 2022 Holley Hotel closure, she convened local partners for a “Community Conversation on Housing,” ultimately helping launch the county’s first Warming Center in 2023. As an adoptive mother and foster parent Nyla has been on both sides of the desk. Four of the 12 children that were once in her care have experienced homelessness as adults, and thanks to her advocacy are homeless no more.

Pillars of Homeless Service Awardees

I have dedicated my career on making a difference in the community. I am driven by a passion to serve and support individuals in need, and I found fulfillment in helping people rebuild their lives. Over the years, I have seen firsthand the impact of systematic issues on individuals and families, and I have been motivated to be a part of the solution. I

have had the opportunity to work with incredible colleagues and organizations, and together we have made a real difference in our community. My experience has taught me the importance of compassion, empathy, and resilience and I am proud to have been a part of this work. I would like to extend my gratitude to Spectrum Health and Human Services for the opportunities and support I've received during my 25 years with the agency. I am thankful for the experience and skills I've gained and the impact it has had on my career.



Alyssa Hebel

Spectrum Human Services

Pillars of Homeless Service Awardees



Tracy Hunt

Buffalo City Mission

I am greatly pleased to be selected for this award; I do not take this work lightly, and I'm very honored to be a part of an incredible team of people. This award inspires me to continue to do what I can to enhance and change the lives of people from all walks of life. Thank you!

Pillars of Homeless Service Awardees

Community Missions has been on the forefront of homeless services for 100 years. The opportunity to support someone's journey and life stability is a humbling experience. Sharing our network of like-minded individuals to ensure housing stability is a gratifying experience. Despite CMI staff receiving these Pillar Awards, every person in this room contributes to the successful journey and life stability for those who are homeless. Every organizational job contributes to what an organization can accomplish to ensure these services are possible. I am so proud to be a part of this collaborative work with all of you as partners and stakeholders.



Robyn Krueger

Community Missions of Niagara Frontier, Inc

Pillars of Homeless Service Awardees



Jan Mansfield

Cornerstone Manor Buffalo City Mission

For two decades, Jan has been a steady beacon of light, bringing hope, compassion, and unwavering support to the women and children we are privileged to serve. Whether comforting someone in their hardest moment or celebrating a new chapter in their life, her tireless efforts at our women and children's shelter have touched countless hearts and transformed lives.

Jan doesn't just serve, she lives our mission. With a servant's heart and steadfast faith, she models the very core of who we are, inspiring residents, staff, and volunteers alike. Her kindness, patience, and perseverance are a living example of Christ's love in action. We are deeply blessed to have Jan as part of our Mission family. Her legacy of love and service will continue to bless generations to come.

Pillars of Homeless Service Awardees

I am humbled to receive the HAWNY Pillar of Service Award. Serving others is simply who I am at my core. It brings me joy, purpose and a deep sense of gratitude. I do not serve for recognition, and truthfully, I would do this work for free. Being able to show up for people, to offer kindness, support or simply a steady presence, is one of the greatest privileges of my life.

Thank you for honoring something that means so much to me.



James McClain

Buffalo City Mission

Pillars of Homeless Service Awardees



Karen Rybicki

Erie County Department of Social Services

For more than 25 years, I've stayed committed to the social services field because I believe deeply in strengthening and uplifting our community's most vulnerable. Since joining the Erie County Department of Social Services in 1999, I've been inspired by countless colleagues and mentors whose leadership and compassion shaped my path. One of my most meaningful memories is seeing a family escape a domestic violence situation and transition from homelessness to stable housing. This experience reaffirmed my purpose. Serving in Executive leadership with the County since 2012 and now as DSS Commissioner since 2024, I'm proud of the programs we've expanded to meet the growing need around homelessness. This work is challenging but continues to motivate me every day.

Pillars of Homeless Service Awardees

When I received the opportunity to work at the Buffalo City Mission women's shelter so many years ago, I felt blessed to continue to help people in need of food clothing and shelter, because it is what everyone needs to survive. I feel a strong sense of accomplishment when I am able to help a mother and her children get a place to call home or when I help a woman who is struggling with her mental health and addiction issues to find stability in our Transitional Housing Program at Cornerstone Manor. I was influenced by my parents who took in friends and family members into our home to help them get on their feet. My parents taught me the Bible verse Mathew 25:40 where Jesus states, "Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me."



Annette Pllaughter

Cornerstone Manor Buffalo City Mission

Pillars of Homeless Service Awardees



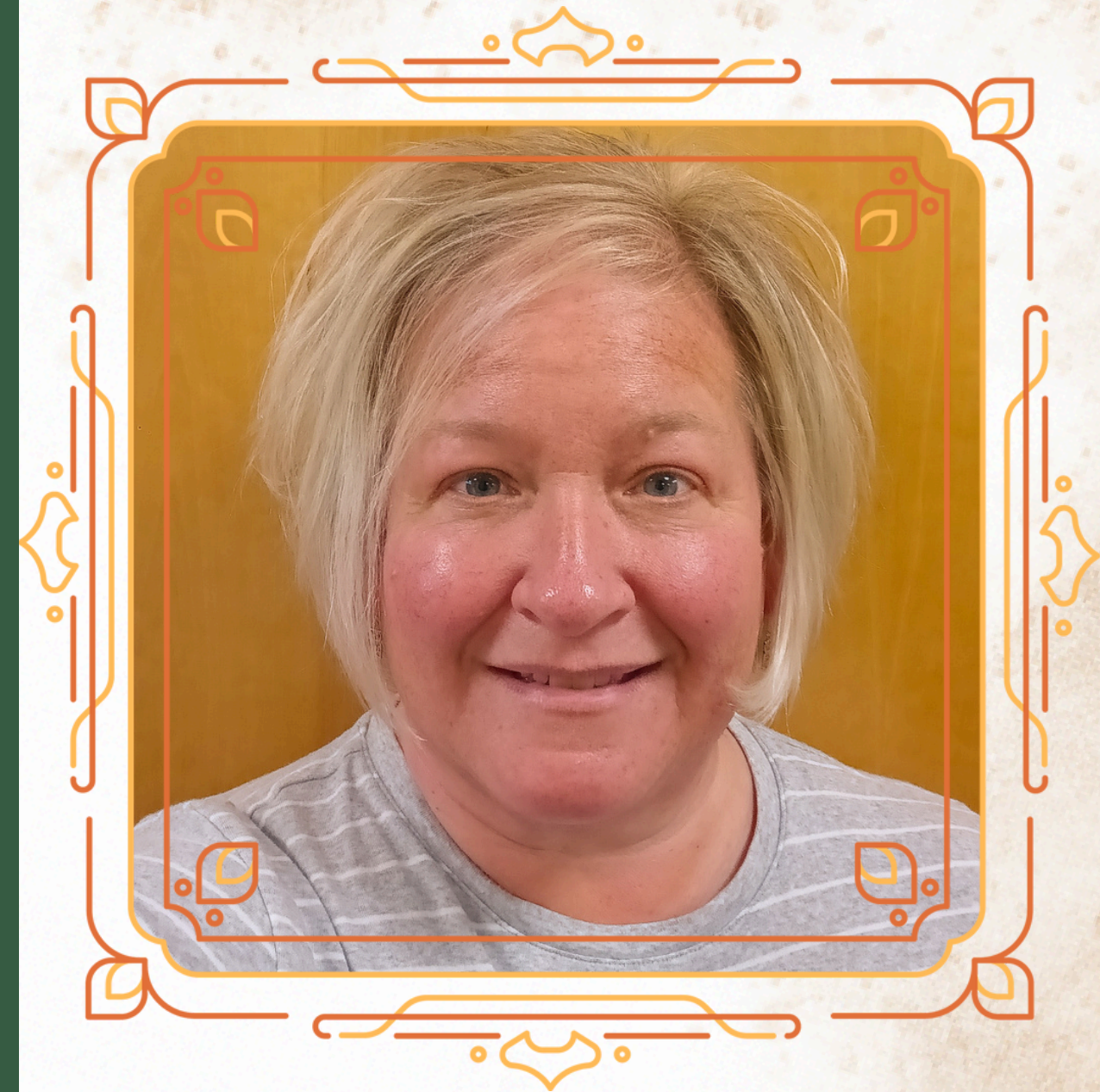
Adrian Smith

Buffalo City Mission

I have been with the Mission 26 years, I have seen various avenues in the homelessness. What motivates me is my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ the compassion and empathy that this population requires. There is nothing that stops this from happening to any one of us. This became my ministry to make a difference for those that could not do it themselves. My greatest memory is helping individuals and family with items they may not be able to afford but at the City Mission we supply those items for free. To see the tears and thank you is so rewarding because that means I am doing the right thing. I thank my family and co-workers for their support even when I wanted to give up at times, they were the push to keep going. I don't regret a day that I had an opportunity to serve at my job. It's an important piece that is sorely needed in our community and I am grateful to be one of the people that helps our community.

Pillars of Homeless Service Awardees

I started out as an intern at Compass House through the University of Buffalo in 1997. Being from the suburbs, I was scared to death to drive into the city, but once I set foot inside the door at the shelter, I immediately felt at ease and all the fear and uncertainty just melted away. I began doing fill-in shifts after a couple of months and then was offered a full-time position as a Youth Counselor. I worked at the shelter for about five years before moving over to the Resource Center. My supervisor at the time, Yvonne Jaros, played a large part in the type of case manager I am today. She taught me how to listen better, how to model better, how to handle a crisis better. She taught me how to just BE better and to always push myself out of my comfort zone. I am still at Compass House 29 years later and am now an Assistant Resource Center Director and Case Manager and continue to do the work I am most passionate about; working with homeless youth.



Amy Smith
Compass House

Pillars of Homeless Service Awardees



Chris Syracuse

Living Opportunities of DePaul

After receiving my master's degree from Buffalo State College in 1987, I worked for about 3 years for a residential agency in the southern tier. During that time, I managed a geriatric Group home for adults with serious mental illness. Most of those individuals had spent 35 years or more in the State hospital. In 1990, I began working for DePaul and have been there ever since. DePaul primarily houses/serves adult individuals with a serious mental illness. DePaul is also a developer of affordable housing, and we serve additional populations such as those who are homeless, those who possess substance abuse disorders, those who are indigent, those who are older adults, and veterans. During my almost 36 years of working at DePaul, I have learned that anywhere from 30-45% of the homeless people across the Country have some form of a mental illness. I think the reason for this is that many people with serious mental illness do not receive proper treatment and therefore, cycle in and out of psychiatric emergency rooms, homeless shelters, and often lose their housing due to their unmanaged psychiatric symptoms. What is most satisfying for me is to personally witness many of these same individuals, be able to turn their lives around, and living meaningful and productive lives.

Pillars of Homeless Service Awardees

Dan has spent more than 24 years serving the residents of Erie County, dedicating his career to supporting older adults, individuals facing homelessness, and anyone at risk of losing stable housing. He has worked extensively to help people maintain their independence, prevent housing loss, and access the essential resources needed to meet their basic needs. Throughout his career, Dan has partnered with community professionals, service providers, and advocates to address the complex challenges that often accompany inadequate housing — including addiction, mental health concerns, and the realities of aging. His hands-on experience has shown him that homelessness is not a distant issue but a very real risk for people of all ages who struggle to get by. These experiences continue to motivate Dan's commitment to providing compassionate, person-centered support and empowering individuals to overcome barriers, achieve stability, and improve their quality of life.



Daniel Izyewc

Erie County Department of Social Services

Pillars of Homeless Service Awardees



Reno Tabone

Living Opportunities of DePaul

I graduated from Buffalo State University and began my career with Living Opportunities in a Community Residence in 1992. During those early years, I gained invaluable insight into mental health, witnessing firsthand both the struggles and the remarkable resilience of the individuals we served. In 1998, Living Opportunities received funding to launch a Transitional Housing Program, and I was entrusted with locating and securing apartments for homeless individuals with behavioral health needs, while also conducting outreach presentations in shelters and hospitals. Over the decades, our organization has expanded services into multiple counties, a clear reflection of the ongoing and unmet demand for support. While I now hold many supervisory responsibilities, the most meaningful part of my work remains maintaining a caseload and engaging directly with clients. Their courage, perseverance, and stories have not only inspired me but have profoundly shaped who I am. They remind me daily why this work matters.

Pillars of Homeless Service Awardees

I've always felt a calling to support people experiencing homelessness, even as a young girl. Volunteering at—and later working at—Friends of Night People showed me how much more I wanted to do and how deeply this work mattered. Over the years, many meaningful moments have stayed with me—especially doing outreach alongside someone who had once been a “client.” Their wisdom and resilience taught me so much; one of their sayings is even framed in my office. Helping people move from crisis to shelter or permanent housing continues to motivate me every day. I've also been fortunate to work with incredible colleagues, partners, and the individuals we serve. This work is hard, and it happens only when many people come together with compassion and commitment. What has kept me going for more than 20 years is having a strong support system—especially my husband, Jason, who has encouraged every project and passion I've pursued and has even done outreach with me.



Joy Tedeschi

Belmont Housing Resources for WNY

Pillars of Homeless Service Awardees



David Zapfel

Gerard Place

THANK YOU for this award! I'm very fortunate to work with dedicated and compassionate people every day. We congratulate HAWNY on your 20th Anniversary and thank you for making a difference in the Buffalo Community.