
"There but for the grace of God, go I"

Philoxenia Times

Winter 2023-2024



Philoxenia volunteers gather for another successful Thanksgiving Pop-Up Pantry in East Harlem. Details on page 2.

President's Message

This edition of the *Philoxenia Times* summarizes a very busy second half of 2023 and offers some insights into the issues we're thinking about for the New Year.

Notably, we explore some of the people, organizations and issues taking place outside of our immediate, recent focus on Harlem and the Bronx. *Philoxenia* was founded by a group of volunteers

based in Westchester County, where we live and worship. In this issue, we speak with Anahaita Kotval, the CEO of Lifting Up Westchester, on affordable housing, homelessness and food insecurity in their community. We also profile some of the organizations we've supported beyond the five boroughs. And we cover our recent slate of activities and topics we're following in the news.

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President's Message (*continued*)

On behalf of our board and organization, thank you for your continued friendship and support; and we wish you the best for a Happy and Healthy New Year.

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Philoxenia's Pop-Up Pantry on October 28.

Philoxenia Finishes 2023 With Successful Pop-Up Pantries

Our mobile (or “pop-up”) pantries continue to serve as Philoxenia’s primary means of helping those in need in our community. We concluded our 2023 slate of programming with another round of successful events.

Thanksgiving came a week early on November 17 in East Harlem. We hosted our Pop-Up Pantry with **Goodwill Industries of Greater NY And Northern NJ**. We provided 150 bags of groceries donated by the employees of **BakerHostetler**, 150 turkeys, **Bombas** socks, handmade hats from **Monica Rodis** and **Beth Huffman** (see our Summer 2023 *Philoxenia Times* profile of Monica and Beth), toothbrushes from **New York State Dental Foundation**, sweatshirts from Philoxenia board member **Rich Schneyer**, and lots of compassion and love from our outstanding volunteers!

On October 28, we held our fall Pop-Up Pantry. We gave out 160+ bags of groceries to those in need plus to-go bags for those without access to kitchens. Thank you to all the volunteers who made this happen including the members of **Life Experience and Faith Sharing Associates**, and **Annunciation Greek Orthodox Church, NYC**. Thank you to **Foodtown of East Harlem** for working so nicely with us to purchase the groceries.



Volunteers from our Fall 2023 East Harlem Pop-Up Pantries.

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Shared Purpose: Philoxenia Helps Nonprofits Advance Our Collective Goals

In addition to our Pop-Up Pantries, Philoxenia focused its efforts in 2023 to helping ally organizations who share our mission to feed and clothe the homeless and those in need. We do this by making one-time grant donations to either small, grassroots nonprofits or those with 501(c) status who are experiencing significant challenges. 2023 organizations included:

- Maui Food Bank. While we at Philoxenia Inc continue to sponsor and conduct programs assisting our NYC neighbors, the 2023 tragedy in Hawaii was a reminder that hunger and food insecurity can affect any of us, at any given time. We were proud to make a donation to the Maui Food Bank, which distributes over 3.25 million pounds of safe, nutritious food each year, including 900,000 pounds of fresh produce, as the organization was focused 24/7 on helping those displaced by the devastating wildfires.
- Jan Peek House/CHHOP. Caring for the Hungry and Homeless of Peekskill (CHHOP), a nonprofit celebrating 35 years of helping those in need in 2023, provides services through the Jan Peek House Shelter, a Westchester County Department of Social Services-funded 24-hour, 365-days a year shelter for single adult men and women. They provide supportive case management services for clients to develop an independent living plan that focuses on obtaining housing and supportive services such as medical, behavioral, employment and educational. We are hosting their 2023 Christmas Eve dinner and giving attendees gift cards to purchase food and essential supplies.

- Interfaith Assembly on Homeless and Housing. Founded in 1986 at the Cathedral of Saint John the Divine in New York City, the Assembly is a coalition of religious organizations and individuals working with and on behalf of homeless, poorly housed and at-risk individuals. The Assembly addresses homelessness in two ways: by helping those who are homeless recover from the trauma associated with their homelessness and begin to rebuild their lives; and by working with our broad base of coalition partners in supporting the establishment of public policies that will produce and preserve housing affordable to homeless and lowest income New Yorkers. Philoxenia sponsored a formerly homeless individual in his efforts to get back on his feet in 2023.
- Hearts of Gold is a nonprofit dedicated to reimagining the future of homeless mothers and their children, together, by helping them to become confident and self-sufficient as they prepare to transition out of the New York City shelter system to permanent homes. Each September, Hearts of Gold runs a backpack giveaway fundraiser. Hundreds of children, grades K-12, will receive brand new backpacks filled with grade-appropriate school supplies. Philoxenia was thrilled to support Hearts of Gold via a donation.
- One Sandwich at a Time. If you're familiar with Philoxenia, then you are familiar with our friends at One Sandwich at a Time (OSAAT), who we frequently partner with for our "Sandwiches and Socks" programs. OSAAT is a successful, grassroots non-profit that has fed over 100,000 hungry New Yorkers. Together with volunteers and their board, OSAAT constructs peanut butter & jelly and ham & cheese sandwiches, bagging them up and delivering them to the areas in which they are most needed - including food pantries, homeless shelters and food distribution centers serving victims of natural disasters, like Hurricane Sandy. Their efforts, and those of the hundreds of volunteers who give of their time, has provided OSAAT with recognition from the United Nations, and cash awards from Godiva among others. Philoxenia was delighted to make a donation to OSAAT in 2023.



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Community Conversations With Anahaita Kotval, Chief Executive Officer, Lifting Up Westchester

For over 40 years, Lifting Up Westchester has provided comprehensive support to people in crisis by giving them access to emergency shelter, food, and support to keep their families safe; facilitating employment readiness and securing job opportunities to increase and sustain income; and finding safe and affordable homes of all types and providing ongoing support to maintain the stability of that housing.

Anahaita Kotval has served as Lifting Up Westchester's CEO since 2017. She began her career as a prosecutor for the Enforcement Division of the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission and then spent 13-years at the Royal Bank of Scotland ultimately serving as Managing Director and General Counsel of its investment bank in the Americas, RBS Greenwich Capital. Her experience on various nonprofit boards helped her to realize she wanted to make a bigger impact in the community, and she transitioned to the non-profit sector in 2011 as the Chief Operating Officer and General Counsel at Inspirica, Inc., a Stamford, CT based nonprofit focused on serving the homeless.



Anahaita is currently on the Board of the Pro Bono Partnership and Non-profit Westchester and has served on the Board of My Sister's Place, the Westchester Community Foundation, the Fairfield County Community Foundation, the Women's Bond Club of New York and the Legal and Compliance Division of the Securities Industry Financial Markets Association.

At Lifting Up Westchester, your organization is guided by a belief that "stable housing is the foundation on which human wellbeing and advancement are built." When many think of homelessness, they envision people living on the street. But it's not that straightforward. Can you please provide insights into the challenges so many have in securing a stable home?

For most of us, our understanding of "homelessness" and perceptions about those who are unhoused comes from our own personal interactions with unhoused individuals and the subtle and not so subtle messaging we receive about homelessness in our culture. Often that involves an interaction with someone living on the street and/or articles we have read about the mental health and drug crises in America – both of which can lead to the common belief that everyone who is homeless is mentally ill or an addict. In fact, nationwide almost two thirds of those who are unhoused are living in shelters – invisible to you and me. (In Westchester, 93% are living in shelters.) More than half of them are employed full or part-time. This is not to say that mental health and substance abuse are not more prevalent in the unhoused population – they are - and their impact is much more significant to those experiencing the instability of having no permanent home. However, the mental health/substance abuse narrative prevents us from acknowledging that homelessness is primarily an economic problem of an individual or family's income not being sufficient to cover rent in many communities across America. Without a wide range of more economical housing options available, low-wage earners and those who have disruptions in employment will continue to cascade into homelessness when their savings run out. This means not only smaller, affordable housing units, but also specialized housing for seniors and those with special needs.

In recent years, Philoxenia has experienced a dramatic increase in helping those with food insecurity. How can addressing the affordable housing crisis in Westchester help fight this related issue?

The more a household has to spend on rent and utilities to maintain their housing the less disposable income they have

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to pay for food, transportation, clothing and other necessities. To the extent that housing is made more affordable, these households will have more resources to pay for food.

As County residents navigate their path out of the pandemic, how can those seeking to volunteer their time to combat homelessness and food insecurity build community support for those in need?

I believe that if we can help people to see the unhoused and the food insecure as people just like us who are struggling financially, our communities will be more willing to make the investments needed to ensure they can be fully participating members of our community. Volunteers who have built relationships with those experiencing these conditions can play an important role in bridging this gap and creating that awareness.



What We're Reading

— As [Westchester Magazine reports](#), amid inflation and a lingering pandemic, Westchester County's social service agencies are busier than ever. Food pantries are still experiencing exponentially more requests for supplies than prior to Covid, and nonprofit and community leaders point to a combination of factors, from spiking inflation to a dearth of affordable housing, for the continued trend. Lifting Up Westchester CEO Anahita Kotval is among those quoted for the story.

— The New York Times [shared the latest results](#) of the U.S. Census Bureau's poverty rate analysis, and the data is troubling. Poverty increased sharply last year in the United States, particularly among children, as living costs rose and federal programs that provided aid to families during the pandemic were allowed to expire.

— The latest in a series of opinion pieces we've been reading, including this op-ed in [City Limits](#), reminds us that food insecurity is not caused by food scarcity. The staggering volume of wasted, discarded food in New York City continues to reinforce the need to better coordinate the efforts of food banks and the broader business community to establish protocols for redeploying excess food to those New Yorkers who needs them most.



Volunteers from Feeding Westchester

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