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STREET OUTREACH

Oneida County brings homeless services directly to Oneida Square

By Thomas Caputo | Staff Writer | TCaputo@RNYmedia.com 21 hrs ago 0



Oneida County departments and community partner organizations recently expanded homeless outreach efforts in Utica's Oneida Square neighborhood, bringing services directly to people in the area.

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UTICA — Oneida County is taking homeless outreach directly into Oneida Square in Utica, deploying county departments and partner agencies to connect people with housing, addiction treatment, and other services where they are rather than waiting.



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Oneida County Executive Anthony J. Picente Jr. said the initiative builds on the county's year-round efforts to assist people experiencing homelessness but was expanded after officials observed an increase in people congregating in the neighborhood this summer.

The county established a visible presence in Oneida Square in recent weeks by setting up mobile units and service tables staffed by county employees and nonprofit partners. Officials have also conducted outreach on surrounding blocks and near Hope House.

"Homelessness does not go away, and it's something we deal with 365 days a year," Picente said. "We always expect people to come to our office for services. This was a twist in which we took our offices to them."

The outreach includes staff from the Oneida County Office of Family and Community Services, Health Department, Mental Health Department and Veterans Service Agency. Partner organizations include ICAN, Helio Health, ACR Health, and the Neighborhood Center.

The goal is to identify people in the area, determine what services they need, and connect them with assistance.

Depending on an individual's circumstances, available services can include emergency shelter, public assistance, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program benefits, Medicaid enrollment, addiction treatment, detoxification programs, rehabilitation services, and housing assistance.

Picente said local homelessness can stem from a variety of causes, including addiction, job loss, mental health challenges, and domestic violence.

Receiving the assistance, however, is up to the individual. Picente noted that, "None of this can be forced. All of this has to be done willingly by the individual."