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# A ‘HANDS-UP PROGRAM’

## Ontario County breaks ground on first family homeless shelter

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USA TODAY NETWORK

CANANDAIGUA – Just last year, Ontario County found short-term housing for 190 homeless people, including 23 families.

And, according to Eileen Tiberio, commissioner of the county’s Department of Social Services, those numbers rose from the year prior.

“The slide to homelessness happens in the blink of an eye,” Tiberio said Jan. 3 at a ground-breaking ceremony for what is expected to be the county’s first family homeless shelter. “We promise you will have a safe place.”

The Molly & Ed Shill Cares Foundation purchased the vacant cobblestone building at 495 N. Main St., Canandaigua, so that up to seven families will be served 24/7 by Family Promise of Ontario County when it opens, possibly later this year. It will hold a maximum of 30 people, officials said.

The nonprofit, which has supported more than 200 families in the county since



its founding in 2018, helps families experiencing or are at risk of homelessness achieve sustainable independence.

The groundbreaking comes after a year when the nation experienced a nearly 40% rise in family homelessness, according to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. Two years ago, 623 evictions took place, a 35% increase from 2019, according to the state Unified Courts System Eviction Dashboard.

The groundbreaking kicked off a lot of work yet to be done to address homelessness in Ontario County, according to Ed Shill; he and wife Molly are co-founders of the foundation. This won’t be the last shel-

**Ground was broken Jan. 3 for a Family Promise of Ontario County family homeless shelter on North Main Street in Canandaigua.**  
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ter if the Shills, the foundation and many supporters have their way.

“This is a war on homelessness,” Shill said. “We’re not going to lose that.”

Families, with the help of Family Promise staff, will create independent living plans to reach their goals of finding sustainable housing.

Strict goals and expectations will include adults having to work and kids having to go to school. This is intended to be a “dry shelter,” meaning no drugs or alcohol use.

This is meant to be a “hands-up program, not a hands-out program,” said Todd Bernhardt, executive director of Family Promise of Ontario County.

Care is being taken to preserve the historical nature of the property, which dates back to the 1830s and was once known as Cobblestone Manor. The three-story building most recently was used to provide health care services.

Canandaigua Mayor Bob Palumbo, who said he fielded calls about the idea when approvals were granted starting in 2023, explained the program will help families stay together.

“This is a big plus for Canandaigua,” Palumbo said. “This is a big plus for Ontario County and any of the families this will help.”