

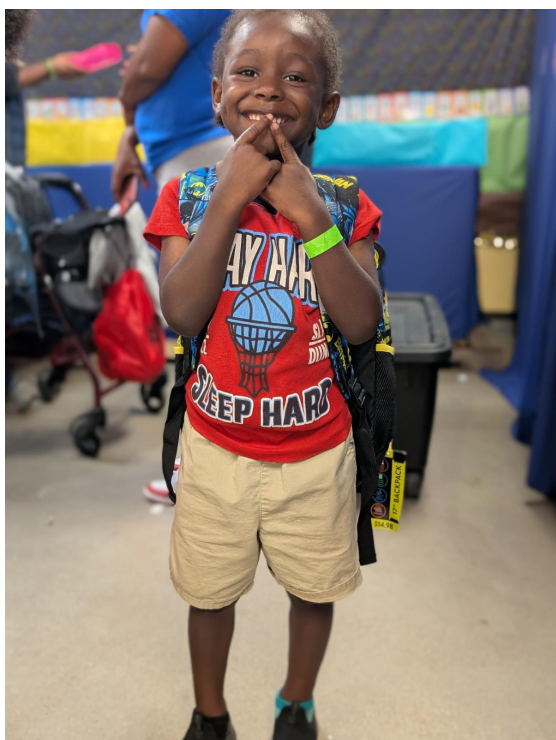


Housing & Shelter Services

MONTHLY NEWS & UPDATES

AUGUST 2025

Back-to-School Rally Brings Joy, Support and Supplies to Families at YMCA Van Buren Center



On Friday, August 15th, the Van Buren Center was full of excitement as 253 individuals attended the **annual Back-to-School Rally**, an event designed to support families in shelter as they prepare for the new school year.



Thanks to Volunteers of America Ohio & Indiana's Operation Backpack drive, **118 school-aged children** were able to visit the school supply giveaway room where they picked out brand-new backpacks filled with essential school supplies, along with fresh socks and underwear to start the school year off right.

The day wasn't just about getting ready for class; it was about building community and having fun. Families enjoyed an outdoor celebration complete with bounce houses, a balloon twister, face painting, cotton candy, snow cones, popcorn, and a cookout. A special thanks goes to the Brandi N. Milbry Foundation, which sponsored an ice cream truck that brought smiles all around.

Children also had the chance to express their creativity by decorating personalized backpack ID tags, a heartfelt activity hosted by longtime Van Buren supporters Bob and Shirley, along with their grandchild.



Community Resources in Action

Fourteen community agencies from across Franklin County attended the event, offering on-site access to vital support services. Some of the

participating organizations included:

- OSU Head Start
- Moms2Be
- OSU James Center for Community Outreach
- Franklin County Job and Family Services
- Columbus City Schools Project Connect
- Charity Newsies
- Franklinton Development Association
- Mid-Ohio Food Collective
- Action for Children



These agencies and others played an essential role in connecting families with healthcare, education, childcare, and more.



A Fresh Start: Back-to-School Haircuts by Braid Slayerz

To help kids feel confident heading into the new school year, Van Buren Center hosted a special Hair Styling and haircutting event on Friday, August 22nd, exclusively for school-aged children in the shelter.

The talented team at Braid Slayerz generously donated their time and services for the fifth consecutive year, offering braiding and styling that left kids beaming with pride. Their energy, compassion, and artistry continue to make this event a highlight of back-to-school week.



IMPACT STORY: Ready for Pre-K and Radiating Joy

This year has been special for many children, bringing joy through wonderful events! One energetic little girl staying with her grandmother at the Van Buren Center was thrilled to start pre-kindergarten.

When she entered the school supply room, her eyes lit up at the colorful backpacks. She eagerly picked her favorite, her happiness infectious as she shared her excitement about school!

Thanks to the amazing staff at the Van Buren Center and generous community partners, she received everything she needed, including a fabulous new hairstyle from the Braid Slayerz event. Her enthusiasm was so contagious that she waited two hours for her turn, practically bouncing with anticipation. Her grandmother proudly noted, "She just wants to look her best. She's been talking about this all week!"

It truly highlights how small acts of kindness and community support can create meaningful impacts. It's a heartwarming reminder of how we can all help children step into new adventures filled with pride and confidence.

See the Impact: Watch 2025 Rally Highlights

Click the link below to view the video.



Together, these events reflect the heart of the Van Buren Center's mission, providing more than just shelter, but a supportive, uplifting environment where families can find stability, opportunity and joy during transitional times.

Our goal to ensure that every school-aged child is prepared for the new school year didn't end with our event; it has continued. In partnership with VOA Ohio & Indiana, **the Van Buren Center has assisted nearly 500 children** in receiving backpacks and school supplies to help them start the 2025-2026 school year off right. In addition to supporting the families staying at the Van Buren Center, we have also been able to assist other agencies and organizations that serve our community.

Thank you to all partners, volunteers, and staff who made this year's Back-to-School celebration one to remember!

Call to Action: Upcoming Opportunities to Support Van Buren Center Families

Outside Volunteer Opportunity: Seeds of Caring - Birthday Bags Anywhere Project

Every child deserves the joy of a birthday celebration! The

Van Buren Center is excited to partner with Seeds of Caring for this exciting service project specifically designed for children aged 2 to 12 who are interested in volunteering.



Through a read-aloud and thoughtful discussion, kids will learn what it means for families to experience "tight times" and why birthdays are so important for everyone. Then, they'll spread kindness by packing birthday bags and decorating cheerful cards for families supported by the Van Buren Center. Together, we're making sure every family can celebrate life's special moments.

Birthday Bags Anywhere Project is available for registration on Seeds of Caring's website <https://www.seedsofcaring.org/participate/columbus> or visit this link for the direct sign-up: [Volunteer Sign-Up](#)



Save the Date: Van Buren's Annual Trunk-or-Treat Event

Our annual Trunk-or-Treat event for families currently staying at the Van Buren Center is scheduled for Friday, October 24, this year.

We need donations of new or gently used children's costumes and bags of candy.

Volunteer to help pass out candy to the families, and have fun getting creative, decorating your trunk and dressing up! The volunteer sign-up for this event will be available on YMCA Volunteer Matters at the end of September.

Questions? For more information, please contact Katrina Martin-Healey, Van Buren Center's Volunteer Coordinator, at katrina.martin@ymcacolumbus.org.

COMMUNITY SPOTLIGHT

Bath & Body Works Volunteers - Back-to-School Rally Decoration Prep

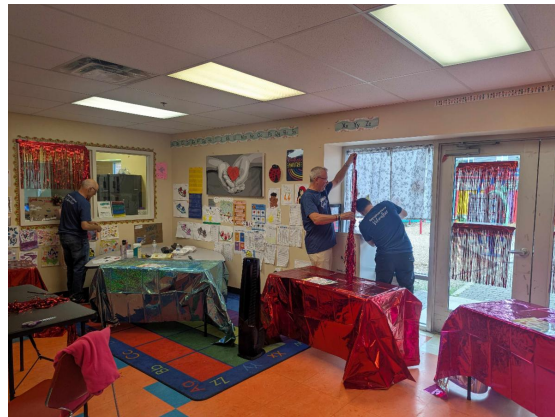


We were thrilled to welcome 28 incredible volunteers from Bath & Body Works who helped transform the family side of Van Buren Center for our Annual Back-to-School Rally!

From blowing up balloons to hanging garland and festive decorations, this amazing team brought energy, creativity and heart, creating a welcoming and cheerful space for the families we serve.

Thanks to their support, our rally was filled with excitement and joy, setting the perfect tone for a successful school year ahead!

We are so grateful to Besa for their partnership and dedication to our mission, and for helping us coordinate this volunteer opportunity.



Columbus Navy Week at the Y-
Van Buren Center Garden Harvest and Meal Prep



As part of Columbus Navy Week, we were honored to welcome two incredible groups of U.S. Navy service members who volunteered their time and talents at the Van Buren Center!

One group rolled up their sleeves in our community garden, harvesting two full wheelbarrows of fresh vegetables, produce that will go directly toward feeding those we serve.

Meanwhile, the second group stepped into the kitchen to chop, prep and help cook dinner for our shelter guests, turning that fresh harvest into a nourishing meal.

We're so grateful for their service, both to our country and to our local community.

Thank you to all the Navy personnel who volunteered across Y's in Central Ohio during this special week. Your impact was truly felt!

Village Women - Tie Blankets for Van Buren Women and Families

Since 2018, the amazing group known as Village Women has been wrapping our guests at Van Buren Center in warmth and care, literally! They've lovingly donated hundreds of beautiful, handmade tie-blankets, bringing comfort and a personal touch to those we serve.

Just last week, they dropped off two carloads full of cozy blankets for our



guests, a generous and thoughtful gift that means so much to those experiencing homelessness.

Now, they need our help to keep their mission going! The Village Women are looking for donations of fabric materials so they can continue creating these one-of-a-kind blankets.

If you'd like to support their incredible work, email vbvolunteer@ymcacolumbus.org to learn how you can donate fabric or resources.

Thank you, Village Women, for your continued compassion and creativity, you inspire us all!

2nd & 7 Columbus Kids' Book Bank - Books for Van Buren Center Families



For over a year, 2nd & 7, through their incredible initiative, the Columbus Kids Book Bank, has been making a lasting impact at the Van Buren Center by donating books every month to promote literacy among the children we serve.

Each delivery includes a thoughtfully curated selection of books that match the interests and reading levels of our young readers, helping to spark imagination, build confidence and foster a lifelong love of reading.

We're so grateful for their ongoing support and commitment to educational equity. These books do more than fill our shelves; they open doors for brighter futures.

Thank you, 2nd & 7, for helping our kids dream big through the power of reading!

Current Van Buren Center Volunteer & Donation Needs

Meal Prep

Available 5 days a week
2:00 p.m. - 4:00 p.m.

- Travel-Size Body Wash
- Travel-Size Shampoo & Conditioner

Dinner Service

Available 7 days a week
5:00 p.m. - 7:30 p.m.

**Meal
Prep**

Dinner Service

- Bar Soap
- Baby Diapers Sizes 4, 5, & 6
- Baby Wipes
- Hairbrushes/combs
- Women's Sneakers Size 6 - 9
1/2 (*new or gently used*)
- Steel Toed Boots

**Amazon Wish
List**

For more information about our available volunteer and donation opportunities, email Katrina Martin, Volunteer Coordinator for the Van Buren Center at katrina.martin@ymcacolumbus.org.

Invest In Your Community

Your gift today transforms lives and strengthens communities. 100% of contributions to our Annual Campaign support providing access to opportunities for all. An investment in the YMCA of Central Ohio goes beyond the Van Buren Center emergency shelter; it's an investment in your community.

Donate Today

**Volunteer & Donation
Hub**



Share This Email



Share This Email



Share This Email

YMCA Housing & Shelter Services | 595 Van Buren Dr. | Columbus, OH 43223 US

[Unsubscribe](#) | [Update Profile](#) | [Constant Contact Data Notice](#)



Try email marketing for free today!