

Board of Directors Recruitment Packet

Help build the leadership, resources, and partnerships that will
move people from homelessness toward lasting stability.

HOPE STARTS HERE

Helping Hands Homeless Shelter is assembling a founding leadership team committed to
compassionate, community-based solutions for homelessness in Erie County.

IRS-recognized 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization

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Welcome from the Founder

Dear Prospective Board Member,

Thank you for considering the opportunity to help build Helping Hands Homeless Shelter. This organization grew from a deeply personal commitment to people experiencing homelessness and from a family history of service here in Erie.

My aunt, Kathleen “Kitty” Cancilla, helped start a shelter on East 26th Street that later grew into Community Shelter Services. My father served as Emergency Shelter Director there for 20 years. Beginning around age 14, I volunteered in the office, sorted donations, helped in the playroom, and worked in the kitchen. Those experiences taught me that shelter is about far more than a bed: it is about dignity, safety, stability, and the steady support needed to begin again.

Helping Hands is now at an important point. We have achieved federal tax-exempt status, developed a thoughtful service model and business plan, begun building community relationships, and started the work of identifying funding and facility opportunities. The next step is assembling a strong, active Board of Directors that can help turn a well-developed vision into a sustainable organization.

We are seeking people who will bring experience, relationships, sound judgment, and a willingness to work. At this launch stage, board service means helping shape strategy, strengthen governance, introduce the organization to the community, and actively participate in fundraising and resource development.

If the mission speaks to you, I invite you to learn more through this packet and begin a conversation with us. Together, we can build an organization that restores stability, dignity, and hope for people across Erie County.

With gratitude,

Joseph R. Cancilla
Founder & Executive Director

About Helping Hands

A housing-focused response grounded in compassion, accountability, and community partnership.

Our Mission

To restore stability, dignity, and hope through compassionate, community-based care.

Our Vision

An Erie County where every person experiencing homelessness can access safety, respect, practical support, and a realistic path toward permanent housing.

Our Service Direction

Helping Hands is being developed as a low-barrier, trauma-informed, Housing First-oriented organization. The planned continuum will connect immediate shelter with coordinated services that help people move toward stability and housing.

- Emergency shelter in a safe, welcoming, and accessible environment
- Individualized case management and housing navigation
- Connections to behavioral health, substance-use recovery, medical care, employment, benefits, and other community resources
- Life-skills development and transitional housing pathways
- Homelessness prevention, diversion, and family stabilization support
- Long-term development of affordable and subsidized housing options

Who We Intend to Serve

Helping Hands is designed to support adults and families whose needs do not always fit neatly into a single program category, including men, women, families with children, veterans, LGBTQ+ people, and individuals managing mental-health, substance-use, recovery, medical, or disability-related needs.

The Need in Erie County

Homelessness in Erie County is not one experience with one solution. People may be displaced by rising housing costs, eviction, domestic instability, job loss, health crises, disability, reentry, family conflict, or gaps in behavioral-health and recovery support. Local providers work hard, yet demand for safe shelter, coordinated services, and attainable housing continues to place pressure on the system.

Helping Hands is being built to add both capacity and connection. The goal is not simply to open more beds, but to create a responsive program that collaborates with existing providers, reduces barriers to entry, and keeps every participant's path to stable housing at the center of the work.

The Board's Opportunity

Founding board members will help determine how Helping Hands grows: which partnerships are built, how resources are secured, how accountability is measured, and how the organization earns lasting community trust.

Guiding Commitments

- **Dignity:** Every person is treated with respect and without judgment.
- **Safety:** Programs are designed around physical, emotional, and trauma-informed safety.
- **Housing focus:** Shelter is a bridge toward stable, permanent housing.
- **Accessibility:** Services should be usable by people with disabilities and diverse needs.
- **Partnership:** Helping Hands will strengthen—not duplicate—the community response.
- **Accountability:** Outcomes, stewardship, ethics, and transparency guide every decision.

Where We Are Today

Helping Hands has moved beyond an idea and into organizational development. The structure, strategy, and early outreach are underway; the immediate priority is building the leadership and funding base needed for launch.

Foundation already established	Work now in front of us
IRS-recognized 501(c)(3) status	Recruit an engaged working board
Defined mission, vision, and service model	Build a diversified fundraising program
Comprehensive business-planning work	Develop a qualified grant pipeline
Needs and service-gap research	Cultivate founding donors and sponsors
Hope Starts Here fundraising identity	Deepen public, private, and nonprofit partnerships
Initial community and partner outreach	Secure and prepare an appropriate facility
Active exploration of suitable facility opportunities	Establish strong governance, policies, and launch oversight

This is a founding-board opportunity

Members will not inherit a finished organization. They will help build the systems, relationships, reputation, and financial strength that allow Helping Hands to open responsibly and endure.

Who We Are Looking For

We are seeking three to four additional board members who believe in the mission and are prepared to contribute time, expertise, relationships, and leadership. Prior nonprofit board experience is helpful, but it is not required. Commitment, sound judgment, follow-through, and a collaborative spirit matter most.

Fundraising & Development

Donor cultivation, sponsorships, campaigns, grant strategy, events, or philanthropic networks.

Finance, Accounting & Banking

Budget oversight, financial controls, audit readiness, lending, capital planning, or investment stewardship.

Marketing & Communications

Branding, public relations, storytelling, digital strategy, media, community engagement, or campaign promotion.

Business & Community Leadership

Corporate relationships, civic networks, strategic planning, operations, entrepreneurship, or workforce leadership.

Healthcare, Human Services & Housing

Behavioral health, recovery, hospitals, case management, veterans' services, child and family services, affordable housing, or homelessness systems.

Legal, Governance & Real Estate

Nonprofit law, contracts, policy, compliance, property acquisition, development, zoning, construction, or risk management.

We also value lived experience

A strong board should include voices informed by direct experience with homelessness, housing instability, poverty, disability, recovery, caregiving, or the systems people must navigate. Lived expertise is leadership expertise.

Board Member Commitment

At this stage, Helping Hands needs an engaged governing board—not an honorary board. Members are expected to participate consistently, prepare for decisions, and help advance agreed priorities.

Commitment	What it means
Term	Two years, with eligibility for renewal in accordance with the bylaws.
Meetings	Regular board meetings at least quarterly; additional working or committee meetings may occur more frequently during launch.
Preparation	Review materials in advance, attend consistently, ask informed questions, and follow through on commitments.
Governance	Provide fiduciary oversight, protect the mission, approve major policies and budgets, monitor results, and support legal and ethical compliance.
Committee service	Serve where skills are most useful, especially fundraising and development, finance, governance, marketing, facilities, or programs.
Ambassadorship	Represent Helping Hands positively, make introductions, cultivate partnerships, and expand community awareness.
Fundraising	Participate personally and actively in resource development through giving, asking, opening doors, sponsorships, grants, donor cultivation, or other agreed activities.
Integrity	Maintain confidentiality, disclose conflicts of interest, exercise independent judgment, and place the organization's interests first.

Fundraising: Everyone Participates

Financial sustainability is one of the board's central responsibilities. Helping Hands will not rely on one grant, one event, or one donor. The board will help create a balanced funding strategy that includes individuals, recurring donors, businesses, foundations, healthcare partners, banks, faith communities, public funding, and other institutional support.

Our Give / Get / Open Doors Philosophy

Every board member makes a personally meaningful contribution and actively helps bring resources to the organization. There is no mandatory dollar amount at this time, but there is an expectation of meaningful participation.

Meaningful participation may include:

- Making a personal annual gift at a level that is meaningful to the member
- Introducing Helping Hands to prospective donors, sponsors, grantmakers, employers, banks, foundations, or civic leaders
- Joining donor meetings and helping make direct, respectful asks
- Reviewing proposals, identifying grant opportunities, or helping secure letters of support
- Recruiting campaign ambassadors, volunteers, or event sponsors
- Sharing campaign messages and telling the Helping Hands story accurately
- Thanking donors and helping steward long-term relationships
- Using professional expertise to reduce costs or secure needed resources

Board members will never be expected to fund the organization alone. They will be expected to help lead a culture in which fundraising is mission work, relationships are treated with care, and stewardship is taken seriously.

Board Candidate Interest Form

Submitting this form begins a conversation; it does not create an automatic appointment. Candidates may be invited to meet with organizational leadership and current board representatives before a formal nomination or vote.

Full name: _____

Preferred phone: _____

Email address: _____

Employer / profession / community role:

Areas of expertise or experience (check all that apply):

- | | |
|---|---|
| ☐ Fundraising / development | ☐ Finance / accounting / banking |
| ☐ Marketing / communications | ☐ Business / operations |
| ☐ Healthcare / human services | ☐ Housing / homelessness |
| ☐ Legal / governance | ☐ Real estate / facilities |
| ☐ Grant writing | ☐ Lived experience |
| ☐ Community / faith leadership | ☐ Other: _____ |

Why are you interested in serving Helping Hands?

What skills, relationships, or perspectives would you hope to contribute?

Are there any current commitments or potential conflicts of interest we should discuss?

I understand that Helping Hands is recruiting an active working board and that board members are expected to participate in governance, meetings, committee work, community ambassadorship, and fundraising.

Signature: _____ **Date:** _____