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**For Immediate Release**

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## **The Watertown Urban Mission expands its “Wheels for Work” program to help low income workers get proper transportation to and from work**

The “Wheels for Work” program is fundable by the Empire State Poverty Reduction Initiative Grant

WATERTOWN, New York (March 13, 2018) - Have you ever tried to concentrate at work knowing you had no way to get home? This is an issue many locals in the community face. Some walk, some bike, and some consistently ask their co-workers for rides. The Watertown Urban Mission’s expanded “Wheels for Work” program will help low income earners have proper transportation to work and will give them the tools that they need to become successful vehicle owners.

“The typical costs associated with purchasing a vehicle are tough to manage for low income workers in our community. Our expanded Wheels for Work program will alleviate that burden and get people proper transportation to and from work so that they can focus on their performance,” says Morgan Spencer, director of development at the Watertown Urban Mission.

This program is funded by the Empire State Poverty Reduction Initiative, a 25-million-dollar initiative to help 16 communities develop strategies to reduce poverty and increase economic opportunity. Watertown was the first to get approval to begin its 1-million-dollar anti-poverty programs. Over 800 thousand dollars will be distributed by the United Way of Northern New York, with the Watertown Urban Mission receiving 150 thousand dollars to go directly to the expansion of their “Wheels for Work” program.

“The magnitude of this grant and the effect it will have on families in our community is so powerful and significant,” said Robert Bowen, critical needs coordinator and facilitator of the Mission’s current Wheels for Work program. The Mission’s current program is a contract with the Jefferson County Department of Social Services and is funded by the New York State Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance’s (OTDA) Transportation Initiative. For 2017-2018, OTDA provided approximately \$15,000 in funding for vehicles and vehicle expenses for low-income workers through the Wheels to Work program. The Empire State Poverty Reduction Initiative funding will significantly increase the program’s ability to meet needs in the community.

The program will help approximately 120 eligible households with vehicles, inspections, maintenance vouchers, vehicle insurance, drivers license fees, registration and title fees, repairs, and inspections. The Mission will hire a program manager to administer the program.

The Mission is currently interviewing for a program manager and seeking out collaborations with local vehicle dealerships. The program is anticipated to be operational by early April. To be eligible, applicants must reside in the city of Watertown, need a vehicle or help with vehicle expenses to get or keep a job, and have income below 200% of the Federal Poverty Guidelines. Applications can be found at the front desk of the Watertown Urban Mission, 247 Factory St. Watertown, New York, or by calling (315) 782-8440. For more information and updates on



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*About the Watertown Urban Mission:* Centrally located in the City of Watertown, the Watertown Urban Mission serves residents in the city and throughout Jefferson County. It works with other community service organizations to ensure needs are met adequately and efficiently. With generous donor and volunteer support, the Mission helps people rise above their circumstances and in turn, this strengthens our community.

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