



NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Local Organizations conducted non-scheduled Unsheltered Homeless Count in Cherokee County and Identify over 700 Homeless

Canton, Georgia – March 7, 2023 the local Veterans organizations and local non-profits conducted a non-HUD sanctioned unsheltered count of the homeless within Cherokee County during the dates of February 28 and March 1, 2023.

“This is a Cherokee County-wide event and we are worked with other veteran and non-veteran organizations outreach teams to help identify our fellow citizens who are living on the street, in their vehicles, or living in conditions that would qualify them as homeless by HUD and VA standards,” noted Jim Lindenmayer. Marianne Butler, Director of the Homeless Coalition of Cherokee County, stated “We are honored to join with these Veteran groups to assist in this effort. These efforts help to further identify the acute needs of those experiencing homelessness in our community enabling us to better offer both relief and recovery services as a bridge to restoration.”

The Veteran organizations participating in the homeless count for Cherokee County include American Legion Post 45 in Canton, American Legion Auxiliary Unit 45 in Canton, VFW Post 5262 in Canton, Canton First United Methodist Veterans, the Marine Corps League of Woodstock, VET Buds, and teams from the Homeless Coalition of Cherokee County joined with these Veteran groups to assist with the PIT count.

This year in January, the national Point in Time Count was conducted focused on sheltered homeless, as we also participated in this annual count, however the national HUD report to Congress dated December 2022, <https://www.huduser.gov/portal/sites/default/files/pdf/2022-AHAR-Part-1.pdf>, pointed out some data from the 2021 unsheltered count that we needed to verify noted Lindenmayer such as:

- Among largely rural Continuum of Care (COCs), Hawaii Balance of State and Georgia Balance of State had the highest percentages of veterans experiencing unsheltered homelessness (82% and 81%). Cherokee County is part of the Georgia Balance of State.
- Cherokee County ranks #2 in total homeless persons in the Balance of State. Bibb County ranks #1. We don't have updated results to see if we now surpass Bibb
- Veterans were less likely than all people experiencing homelessness to be in major cities (47% vs. 50%). Rural counties like Cherokee is where we are seeing more homeless Veterans coming to us as we have a viable program to help them

These facts along with the recent Homeless Study recently published by Cherokee County lead us again to hit the streets to find out how many are actually homeless.

2022 Cherokee County Homelessness Needs Assessment

Prepared for:



Prepared by:

A.L. Burruss Institute for Public Service and Research

Kennesaw State University

Our approach was to use our 8 years of history in conducting PIT counts and do exactly what we have done in the past, **HIT THE STREETS**. Why would we want to do this? The answer is not as easy as a single answer, noted Lindenmayer. In particular we wanted to accomplish the following:

- Search for Homeless Veterans to include those with Mental Health and Children and get them into rapid rehousing and mental health programs. ***We found 2 Veterans with mental health issues and 3 Homeless Veterans, two with families***
- Engage the community partners such as Food Banks, local businesses, and churches to identify if they are seeing homeless on a regular basis. ***We contacted all of the Food Banks a week ahead of our count and found a number of them had in fact supported homeless in the recent past. Some of the Food Banks we talked to noted that they do not ask clients if they are homeless, this may add others to our count had they been counted. This information provided us a picture of about 60-70***
- Engage with CCSD to see if we have homeless children in schools. ***Per the information we were provided there were about 187 homeless Children enrolled in CCSD, adding estimated parents of these children and you almost reach 500 of the 700 we are reporting.***
- Interact with the homeless we found to see if they could help us engage with other homeless that they were aware of. ***This provided us with about 140+ of the 700 estimated homeless***
- Verify the locations where they are so that we can again do this again next year. ***We did and we will keep our findings to ourselves.***

What next? The recent \$2.5M of Federal ARPA funds issues by the county will certainly help, however, the actual amount of funding needs to be 3x or 4x of what was awarded. Our program already has acted on all of the Veterans, either getting them into the VA or our new Mental Health program, we have them also connected with Federal Housing programs in hopes that we can find them a place for longer living instead of the hotels we have them in currently. As for the non-Veterans who are out there, 11 have already been put in hotels by the Cherokee Homeless Coalition and the others will do what they currently do....Survive as best they can.

What about other funding? Last fall a \$322M Rural Homeless HUD grant was issued to address rural homelessness in the nation, however only 101 of the 152 rural counties were allowed to bid. Cherokee County was not one of the 101 selected even though we are one of the 31 counties that reported PIT count findings in 2021 and we are either #1 or #2 for homelessness in Georgia. I was just notified last week that none of the 101 small rural counties elected to submit a bid and the funding that was targeted for this grant was returned to HUD.

9 years ago when we first started our program, everyone in the county told me that ***“We do not have a homeless Problem”***. Guess we now do.