

Cherokee County Homeless Veteran Program

2025 Year End Report

JANUARY 2

Cherokee County Homeless Veteran Program
Authored by: Jim Lindenmayer



2025 RECAP

PROGRAM CELEBRATES 11 YEARS IN OPERATION IN SUPPORT OF HOMELESS VETERANS.

Since our program started on November 11, 2014, we have continued with our primary mission to help those Veterans, both male and female, who have found themselves homeless post military service.

Our goal originally as stated in our Mission Statement, was to “Advocate for those Veterans who are homeless in Cherokee County”. Back in 2015 there were over 108,000 Homeless Veterans estimated to be living on the streets by the Veterans Administration. This crisis led to then President Obama creating what was called the Mayors Challenge with the end goal of ending Veteran Homelessness.



May 2014

Project CHALENG – Identifying and Meeting the Needs of Homeless Veterans

Background

Project CHALENG (Community Homelessness Assessment, Local Educations and Networking Groups) for Veterans was launched in 1994 to bring together homelessness service providers, advocates, Veterans and other concerned citizens to identify the needs of homeless Veterans and work to meet those needs through planning and cooperative action. CHALENG is designed to be an ongoing assessment process that describes the needs of homeless Veterans and identifies the barriers they face to successful community reentry. This process has helped build thousands of relationships with community agencies, Veterans groups, law enforcement agencies, and Federal, state, and local government. Local CHALENG meetings represent important opportunities for the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and public and private agency representatives to meet and develop meaningful partnerships to better serve homeless Veterans.

Project CHALENG has two components: a CHALENG survey, in which participants rate the needs of homeless Veterans in their local communities, and CHALENG meetings, which encourage partnership development between VA and community service providers. The results of the CHALENG survey are used each year to identify unmet needs and encourage new partnership development to meet those needs.

Over the years, CHALENG has helped build thousands of relationships between VA and community agencies so they can better serve homeless Veterans locally. Data from CHALENG on Veterans' unmet needs has assisted VA in developing new services for Veterans such as the Homeless Veteran Dental Program (HVDP), the expansion of the Department of Housing and Urban Development-VA Supportive Housing (HUD-VASH) Program, the Veterans Justice Programs and Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF). In addition, community organizations use CHALENG data in grant applications to support services for homeless Veterans. These grant applications bring VA, other Federal, local government, and community foundation dollars, which maximizes community participation in serving homeless Veterans.


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The only problem was that the government oversaw this program and it would soon be just another Federal program whereby the numbers and claims turned out not to be correct. Only issue was that Homeless Veterans were still paying the price.

In all there are just over 4,000 cities that could have joined the President's program and only less than .4% of the cities signed up to participate in the program. Two of the notable cities that were early self-proclaimed to have ended the Veteran Homelessness problem were the Cities of Atlanta and Los Angeles. We all know where these cities are today.

Mayors Challenge to End Veteran Homelessness

in 2015






Opening Doors: The Federal Strategic Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness set a bold and audacious goal to end Veteran homelessness in the United States before the end of 2015. Over the last three years, the Obama Administration and our partners in states and communities across the country have achieved a 24 percent decrease in homelessness among Veterans, during a time when our country was facing the worst recession since the Great Depression. Several communities, such as Phoenix, Salt Lake City, Houston, New Orleans and others are already on track to meet or beat this goal. On June 4, 2014, as part of the Joining Forces initiative, First Lady Michelle Obama announced that a growing coalition of mayors, governors, and county officials are committed to ending Veteran homelessness in their communities by the end of 2015, and called on additional mayors and local leaders to join this effort.

Through the Mayors Challenge to End Veteran Homelessness, mayors and other state and local leaders across the country will marshal Federal, local, and nonprofit efforts to end Veteran homelessness in their communities. Ending Veteran homelessness means reaching the point where there are no Veterans sleeping on our streets and every Veteran has access to permanent housing. Should Veterans become homeless or be at-risk of becoming homeless, communities will have the capacity to quickly connect them to the help they need to achieve housing stability. When those things are accomplished, our nation will achieve its goal.

To aid the mayors in pursuit of the goal of ending homelessness among Veterans, the Federal government has provided resources and enforced programs to strengthen our country's homeless assistance programs. These resources and reforms, when implemented in local communities, can include:

- Using a **Housing First** approach, which removes barriers to help Veterans obtain permanent housing as quickly as possible, without unnecessary prerequisites;
- Prioritizing the most vulnerable Veterans, especially those experiencing chronic homelessness, for **permanent supportive housing** opportunities, including those created through the HUD-VASH program;
- Coordinating outreach efforts to identify and engage every Veteran experiencing homelessness and focusing outreach efforts on achieving housing outcomes;
- Targeting **rapid rehousing** interventions, including those made possible through the Department of Veterans Affairs' Supportive Services for Veteran Families program, toward Veterans and their families who need shorter-term rental subsidies and services in order to be reintegrated back into our communities;
- Leveraging housing and services resources that can help Veterans who are ineligible for some of the VA's programs get into stable housing;
- Increasing early detection and access to preventive services so at-risk Veterans and their families remain stably housed; and
- Closely monitoring progress toward the goal, including the success of programs achieving permanent housing outcomes.

To publicly commit to ending Veteran homelessness in your community and to learn more details about joining the Mayors Challenge, send an email to mayorschallenge@hud.gov and visit <http://bit.ly/mayorschallenge>.

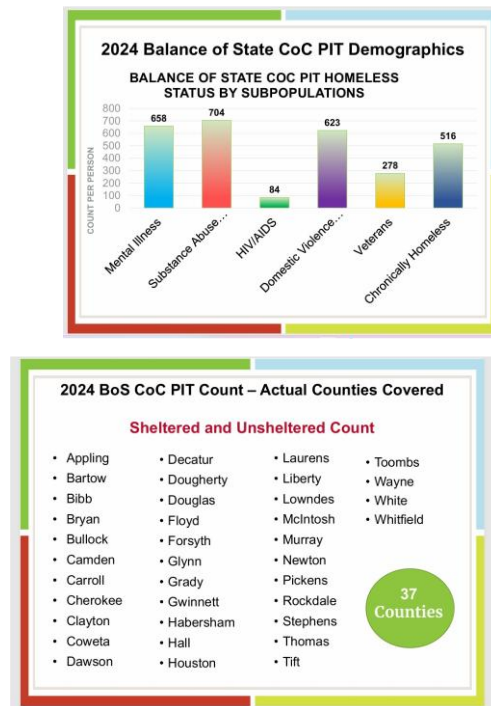
A joint initiative of Joining Forces, U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness, U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development and U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
<http://bit.ly/mayorschallenge>

Not unlike Atlanta and Los Angeles, many cities and counties were reluctant to admit that they had any homeless problems let alone a homeless Veteran problem and Cherokee County Georgia could be added to this list. Working with the HUD team out of Atlanta it was determined that Cherokee County did have homeless but since no evidence was ever gathered, heads remained in the sand.

The last 11 years have seen the evidence come to light on our homeless situation both Veteran and non-Veteran within Cherokee County. Today, as in the past 9 years, there are teams that participate in the yearly HUD Homeless Point in Time, PIT, Count which is designed to count homeless either sheltered or unsheltered across the nation. Just in 2024, Cherokee County identified almost 700+ homeless across the county. 225 of these were homeless students, K-8, within CCSD. If this number were to be true then there are roughly another 400-450 parents of these homeless children as well as the roughly 100 Homeless Veterans that our program worked with over the year.

Even though these numbers may be estimates, we can feel some accomplishment in the fact that our county is only one of 37 counties out of the 159 in the state that participated in the 2024 PIT Homeless Count.

As we leave 2025 behind us we feel confident that our programs and partnerships are solid and will continue to served the Veteran population of not only Cherokee County, but Pickens County as well.



CURRENT STATE OF VETERAN HOMELESS AND HOUSING PROGRAMS

Due to the programs we offer and the success of these programs, Cherokee and Pickens will remain counties that have to deal with Homeless Veterans. We were contacted or worked with just over 100 Homeless Veterans in 2025. Because some of these were not in our program coverage area, the types of support services that we were able to provide were limited to non-financial support to include, the Vehicle donation program, VA Claims support, and Eviction Diversion assistance. For those Homeless Veterans that we worked within our coverage area, we were able to bring to bear our entire portfolio of services as noted in our program offering.

VETERAN HOUSING IS AT A CRISIS LEVEL

During the summer of 2025, our program visited and interviewed all of the apartment complexes and their management to understand if and to what extent they support Veteran housing to include the Federal Housing programs of Supportive Services for Veterans and families (SSVF) or HUD VA Supported Housing (HUD VASH) here are the findings section of that report.

FINDINGS

The current programs to house Veterans, especially homeless Veterans in Cherokee County do not support the needs to the Veteran community as these programs exist today. Two of the three Federal Veteran housing programs do not exist

in Cherokee County and the third program has seen a 62.5% loss of participants in the program within the last 12 months, leaving only three apartment complexes left in the program.

Other non-Federal Veteran housing programs operated at the state level again have issues with program availability due to application requirements, age limitations, usage issues at various apartment complexes and funding.

Lastly, the issue of Veteran inability to obtain housing, due to current VA disability payment limits still exists after it was presented to our elected Federal Representatives over four (4) years ago. Even though some apartment complexes still do not subscribe to the Covid Era 3:1 rent to income ration and have lowered this ration, many Veterans who are 100% SC VA Disabled cannot pass 3rd party rent qualification due to their current income limits.

100% SC VA disabled Veteran are still held hostage by the VA's and the Social Security Administration's (SSA) inability to inform these Veterans of additional service earned income for the Social Security's SSDI program due to their inability to pass appropriation legislation that would allow one sentence to be added to the VA Disability Award Letter indicating that additional benefits could be obtained by visiting the SSA website.

POTENTIAL VETERAN HOUSING OPTIONS

	SSVF	HOTEL VOUCHER	GA VETERANS HOME	811	TRANSITIONAL HOUSING PGM	OTHER EVICTION DIVERSION
Married w/Children	Y	Y	N	N	N	Y
Female	Y	Y	Y	N	FUTURE	N
Male	Y	Y	Y	N	Y (FUTURE)	N
Over 60	Y	Y	Y	N	?	N
Disabled under 61	Y	Y	Y	Y	?	N
Single female w/children	Y	Y	Y	N	FUTURE	Y

If you would like to obtain a copy of the full 2025 Veteran Housing Study you can down load it from our Website at <https://www.cherokeehomelessvets.com/>

The housing options for homeless Veterans are caught up in programs that are failing as with SSVF losing 5 of 8 apartment complexes in the last 12 months even though there were at least 5 new apartment complexes opened in the county and we expect another 5 opening in 2026. Likewise, we just saw the Canton Housing open the new Tanner Place in September;

Members of the Canton Housing Team and the Canton Housing Authority recently visited the active construction site of Taer Place.

Named for former City Council member and longtime Canton resident Pat Tanner, Tanner Place marks the first new public housing development in nearly 50 years.

The previously existing 39 old and outdated units were demolished last year, and are being replaced with 70 brand new units, which will be ready to occupy beginning in September 2025.

Funded through Low Income Housing Tax Credits, the project will also utilize HUD-funded project-based vouchers to assist with resident rents.

The only problem with this site for Veterans is that we cannot use any HUD VASH vouchers at this facility as the charter for the Canton Housing Authority does not provide for Case Management which is a mandatory requirement of HUD VASH. You will notice in the above Potential Housing Option chart that HUD VASH is not even listed and this is because HUD VASH is only supported in three locations in Georgia and they are; Decatur, Carrollton, and Rome GA. This was finally confirmed to us by the Regional HUD VASH director out of North Carolina.

What this means to our program is that we need to continue to utilize the current Hotel stay strategy that is currently in place until we can obtain funding for the Homeless Veteran Transitional Shelter.

EVICTON DIVERSION

One of the highlights of this year's program is our focus on Eviction Diversion. We started to see this as an issue a couple of years ago when we started getting calls from the Cherokee County School District and local law enforcement dealing with the eviction process here in Cherokee County. Seeing that this was a growing issue, we started looking for grants and partners in this space that we could work with as evictions typically deal with multiple thousand of dollars, more than our program could afford. Luckily, we found a couple of partners willing to work with us and we went to work. Additionally, evictions tend to deal with families being evicted rather than a single homeless Veteran.

In 2025 we dealt with 29 Veteran evictions, 27 of these in Cherokee County and two outside one in Rockdale County and the other in Gwinnett County. Of the 29 we were successful in halting 26 of the evictions leaving three that we could not address. One was that the Veteran had waited months to seek help and with over \$12,000 in back rent our program and our partners could not address this.

Sadly, this was a Veteran with a wife and 5 children that were eventually evicted. One of the two remaining that we could not help was not able to obtain funding for his \$3,400 outstanding payment due to a felony conviction on his record. The partner we use does not support felony convictions and he and his 5-year-old daughter were evicted. The last Veteran that was evicted, our program supported the eviction. We had worked with a 3rd party partner and had supported a couple of months to prevent his eviction; however, this Veteran failed to comply with our guidance and fell into MH and substance abuse issues that caused us to pull support for him. Just after his eviction, he was placed into rehab out of state for treatment.

The two Veterans and their families that we helped who were outside of our coverage area, we helped by connecting one of our financial partners to them. The \$5,700 needed to resolve their evictions was all paid by our partner as our funding cannot be used outside of our coverage area.

Through our efforts on this initiative, we were able to help more than 60 children stay in their current housing and together with our partners we were able to fund Eviction Diversion which totaled more than \$48,000.

STOLEN VALOR STILL SEEN

Our program is not immune to attempts at fraud of services and we pride ourselves on the depth of intake that our program does. This past year we had multiple cases of stolen valor attempted at our program and through our requirement to have the person provide his/her DD214 or VA card prior to any support being provided, we expose the would be Veteran imposter. We understand that in many cases, homeless Veterans lose all their documents and show up with none. Using several ways to validate federal service. In each case it took us only a couple of days to verify that these imposters were not Veterans and we referred them to other agencies. We also had a couple of Veterans we had to deny service to as they were in possession of a discharge status of "Less than Honorable" or "Bad Conduct Discharge". Our program requires you to be in possession of a honorable discharge. In the cases of the LTH and BCD Veterans we were able to refer them to a program in Washington State that will work with them. We also know that other programs do not vet their program candidates and one of the BCD veterans we encountered had been provided over 6 weeks of housing and had never been vetted.

We owe it to those who provide us with donations to ensure that we are great stewards of the funds entrusted to us.

STATE OF CCHVP PROGRAM SERVICES

Here is our lineup of our program services.



Cherokee County Homeless Veterans Program



• Homeless Services

- VA Claims Support
- Emergency housing
- Food/Clothing/toiletries
- Jobs and resume building
- Furniture – on demand limited area
- Transportation Services – LYFT
- Community Medical Services through partnership
- Rent/Utilities Support
- Food Pantry



• Homeless Services

- Vehicle donation program for disabled/formerly homeless Veterans.
- Veteran Home Repair program for low income/elderly/disabled Veterans
- Various other programs throughout the year.
 - Veteran Fly Fishing program
 - Holiday Adopt a Vet program
 - Annual winter coat drive

• Program restrictions:

- Must be honorably discharged Veteran
- Funds are limited to availability
- Some services are limited by location



Check us out at AuntBertha.com search "Cherokee County Homeless Veterans Program in ZIP30114 or contact Jim Lindenmayer at jilindenmayer80@gmail.com or at 678.983.7590. We are a 501c19 Veteran non-profit. We are also On Facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/Cherokee-County-Homeless-Veterans-Program-100563751388542>

In 2025 we continued to provide what is called wrap around services to the Veterans of our community. I would like to highlight some of our services here;

Vehicle Donation Program - in 2024 we thought we had a great year in donating 10 vehicles to Veterans who met our program criteria. Well, 2025 turned out to be another banner year for Veterans as we donated 11 vehicles to Veterans across the state of Georgia reaching 80 vehicles donated since we started the program 10 years ago.

Of the 80 donated over 75 are still on the road which is a feat in that most all these vehicles have more than 150,000 miles on them. We run all vehicles through a diagnostic process through our partner Christian Brothers Automotive and fix those items that we determine are essential to make the vehicle road worthy and safe to drive. Those vehicles that we find to need major repairs and require more than 40% of the vehicle value we sell at auction and put the funds back into the program.

Every vehicle we donate is retitled to the American Legion so that as a non-profit we can guarantee donors their donation is legal. Veterans who qualify for the program pay \$1 for them to take ownership. Transportation is key for getting Veterans to medical appointments Children to school and for getting to work. We have documented cases of homeless Veterans being able to go from a \$7 per hour job to \$25 per hour job because of having transportation.

Coat Drive – this program was never intended to be a stand-alone yearly program, but after a low-income Navy Veteran’s young daughter asked for a new coat for Christmas and a picture for her grandmother as her only gifts, we wondered how many others need coats. Since the program started we have grown our coat goals and with the hurricane that hit last year, we did not think that we would do more than the 8,000 coats in 2024. Guess again, as our partner in this program, Arrow Exterminator and Ga Pest Vets set the goal for 2025 at 10,000 coats. On December 2025 we sorted and donated 10,200 coats so far and are trying to fill another 300 coat orders that came in late. This program has donated over 35,000 coats since starting the program. Coats are given to all sorts of Veteran outreach programs and many civilian groups.

Veteran Fly-Fishing Program – With support from the Cohutta Chapter of Trout Unlimited we have had almost 200 Veterans, many with mental health issues attend this free program. There are two sessions yearly for up to 20 Veterans per session to attend either in the Spring or Fall of the year. The program has 3 class days and then it moves up to northern Georgia for the final day, which is a day on the river to test what they have learned. All equipment and guides as well as instructors for this program are provided by the Cohutta Trout unlimited team lead by Vietnam Veteran Rob Hilkin.

VA Claim Support – One of the first actions taken when we process homeless Veterans is to conduct a Military Records review with the Veteran at the Canton office of the Georgia Department of Veteran Services. There are many instances whereby we can get a homeless Veteran off the street and back into society by re-activation VA benefit claims that have been cancelled by the VA. The VA has a policy that if a Veteran misses two appointments on their claim, the claim is cancelled.

If you are homeless, and no address or phone number it is almost a given that your claim will be cancelled. This is why every homeless Veteran uses the Canton American Legion Post as their home of record currently. We can get their VA appointment documents and communicate with the Veteran that they need to make the scheduled medical and compensation appointments. Just recently, we had a homeless female Navy Afghanistan Veteran obtain her 100% SC rating in just six weeks as we were able to reactivate her VA claims that has been cancelled. The result of this took her from \$0 to \$4,000 a month in benefits allowing her to find housing and get off the street. Not every case takes this short a time as the VA can take up to 8 years to finalize benefits.

Adopt a Vet holiday program – Our community of Veterans has a number of low income Veterans and families that are on the edge of poverty and could easily become homeless at some future point. Each year our program working with Betty Lewis and her American Legion Auxiliary operates the “Adopt a Vet” program to make sure that the children and the families will have a holiday they might otherwise not. Our community is very giving and supportive and each year organizations, churches, and individuals adopt these families for the holiday. We also make sure that they have food, clothing, toiletries, and other items for the holidays and are not forgotten.

Mental health outreach and partnerships - In 2022, our Veterans community suffered six suicides, some leaving children and spouses behind. Since that time, our mental health outreach programs and partnerships have focused on making sure we do all that we can do to prevent further incidents of Veteran suicide. Our program performs what we call the “Tip of the Spear”

triage on Veterans in crisis so that we can get Veterans who need mental health counseling can get routed to the best source first. Our program does the Veteran-to-Veteran trust building and low-level issue handling such as being homeless, in need of transportation, VA Claims, etc. This Veteran-to-Veteran interaction allows us to engage the correct next phase mental health team such as Pathlight LLC run by Navy Veteran Brit Parramore for substance abuse or mental health, or the VET Center run by Holli Kelly dealing with combat trauma or Military Sexual Trauma (MST) issues or to Shephard Center for issues dealing with TBI's. Veterans do not want to be on the magical mystery tour when it comes to mental health support and we strive to get the Veterans we encounter who need help to the right source the first time.

Strength through partnerships – Our program could not do what we do without partners like, Arrow Exterminator, Kimberly-Clark, Cohutta Chapter of Trout Unlimited or the number of local churches and other groups that do food drives for our food pantry. Likewise, we also could not do what we do without support from our community of Veterans as they are an integral part of our program. Soliel Veterans Club, American Legions Post 45 and 316, VFW Post 5262, Marine Corps League Detachment 1311 and other Veterans organizations and Veteran owned businesses like Rally Point and Alma Coffee support our program throughout the year. With over 18,000 Veterans living in our coverage area, we are pleased that the Veterans of this community do so much for other Veterans.

By Carolyn Mathews | Posted: Wednesday, November 26, 2014 12:00 am



Effort to end veteran homelessness kicks off

Post Commander Raymond Rollins, at the podium, leads representatives of federal, state and local governments in kicking off an effort to end veteran homelessness. On Nov. 12, Thomas M. Brady American Legion Post 45, in Canton, introduced the Mayors Challenge to End Veteran Homelessness to the community.

The Cherokee County Veteran Homelessness Project is off the ground, coordinated by the Thomas M. Brady American Legion Post 45, in Canton. The Legion is leading Cherokee County municipalities and organizations as they attempt to locate and house homeless veterans as a part of the national effort, Mayors Challenge to End Veteran Homelessness.

City and county representatives signed a community covenant at a meeting held at Post 45 headquarters Nov. 12, committing to work together to form partnerships to aid homeless veterans.

Over the past three years, First Lady Michelle Obama has worked with state- and community-level partners to reduce homelessness, and, according to Deputy Regional Administrator Joe Phillips of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), there is a 24 percent decrease in homelessness among veterans since 2010.

"This is the first administration to address homelessness. We are going to defeat it. No other administration has said that," Phillips said. "I'm a vet myself, and this issue is very important and real. We can't remember veterans just once a year."

At the kick-off meeting with community partners, including mayors from the municipalities of Cherokee County, HUD, VA Homeless Project, American Legion Homeless Veterans Taskforce, MUST Ministries, Bethesda Community Clinic and the Cherokee Ministerial Association, Phillips said the Mayor's Challenge is a bipartisan effort to work with veterans.

“No vets should ever find themselves homeless,” he said. “Seventy mayors have signed up, and we’re headed in the right direction. As we experience the blessings of the holiday season, we should lend a hand to those who served our country who need help at this time.”

Phillips presented several statistics: One out of every four homeless men have served their country; 500,000 to 800,000 vets are homeless during a year; and 45 percent of homeless vets suffer from mental illness. Patricia Bradford, the southeast regional homeless veteran’s coordinator for the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, said that homeless vets are most often found living alone, rather than with their families. According to that department’s statistics, 51 percent of homeless veterans are disabled, 90 percent are male and 48 percent are members of minority groups.

Post Adjutant Lynne Rollins said she was moved by Julia Kelly, who told her story at the Post 45 gathering. Kelly now works for veteran homelessness programs through the United Way of Greater Atlanta.

Kelly grew up in Atlanta, finished high school, graduated from Reinhardt College, joined the military, married and had a daughter and worked for a publication in Atlanta for 20 years. In 2013, she lost her job and couldn’t find another one. Once all her severance was exhausted, she could no longer pay her rent. Not wanting to burden her daughter, she slept on friends’ couches for several months, until she learned about the United Way’s Vets Connect Program, which helped her find housing, employment retraining, clothes and food.

“The program gave me some hope and dignity in what I was going through,” Kelly said. “Now, I feel peaceful and settled. I’m glad I never lost hope.”

Post 45 member Jim Lindenmayer is coordinating the post’s program to reduce veteran homelessness.

Rollins said this is the first time the Post has ever taken on an endeavor like reaching the homeless.

Several groups are knitting scarves and hats, she said.

“The first thing we need to do is to find the homeless in the community, and then establish a cold-weather shelter,” she said.

“Then we need to guide them to the Dec. 3 Supermarket of Veterans Benefits, to be held at the Cherokee Conference Center at The Bluffs from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m.”

The supermarket will bring together representatives from federal, state and local government agencies to provide a “one-stop shop” for veterans benefits information.

“There are many agencies that provide benefits and services to veterans, and this is a great opportunity for veterans to learn about all of them in one day,” said Georgia Department of Veterans Services (GDVS) Commissioner Pete Wheeler. “Since we began this program in 1966, thousands of veterans and their families have benefited, and we are pleased to bring this history of success to Canton.”

