

HOMELESS VETERANS PROGRAM

2020 YEAR IN REVIEW



Cherokee County Homeless Veterans Program

18th Edition

COVID DID NOT STOP OUR PROGRAM FROM HELPING NEEDY VETERANS DURING 2020

2020 was not the type of year that anyone wanted, especially those who were in need. Throughout 2020 many businesses, churches, and programs were either closed or cancelled due to the effects of COVID with a notable exception of our program. From the onset of the program to the recent vaccine distribution, our program and the volunteers who support our program went about doing what we have always done, i.e. Taking care of Homeless Veterans and taking care of Veterans in need of help, but with a cautious approach or program changes..

Let me address some of the highlights of the past 12 months:

Homeless Point in Time Count. January 25th was supposed to be the start of the HUD National homeless Point in Time (PIT) count across the state of Georgia looking for sheltered and unsheltered homeless living in our counties to include Veterans and non-Veterans. According to the State of Georgia Department of Community Affairs who runs the homeless count scheduled PIT cancelled this year's event due to COVID concerns. Currently, Cherokee County ranks #2 behind Bibb County for overall numbers of Homeless persons in what is called the Balance of State "BOS" which represents the 152 rural counties of Georgia

"Local Veterans Organizations and local non-profits once notified of the PIT cancellation, teamed up instead to conduct a county wide outreach to find and help the homeless within Pickens and Cherokee County's. Starting on a cold, foggy Monday and ending on a cold and sunny Friday, various Veteran teams across the county walked fields, under bridges, behind shops, restaurants, parking lots and even in abandon houses in search of the homeless that are residing in our community, noted Jim Lindenmayer, Director of Cherokee County Homeless Veterans program and American Legion Post 45 Service Officer who lead the outreach.

The outreach proved to be very successful as over 30 homeless were identified and helped during the four days of outreach. We encountered them in every town and city in Pickens and Cherokee County. "We found homeless in both rural as well as urban settings, living in cars, on the street and with some trying to stay out of the cold and rain taking shelter in abandon houses, tents, and make shift shelters," said Lindenmayer. The numbers included elderly, families, single females, single males, as well as Veterans.

All homeless that were identified as Veterans have or are currently undergoing a 96 hour intake process that is designed to get them into temporary housing, obtain food, clothing and schedule a VA claims review with the local Canton office of the Georgia Department of Veteran Services. One of the Veterans that was encountered was a 67 year old male Veteran who had recently been evicted. We were able to reach out to Tim Morris, director of the Cherokee County Sr. Services to obtain temporary shelter for this Veteran through their program and we will begin his intake on Monday. The others are working with the Veteran volunteers of the Cherokee County Homeless Veterans Program which was started 7 years ago by Lindenmayer to help combat Veteran homelessness.

The Veteran Organizations participating in the veteran outreach included American Legion Post 45 in Canton, VFW Post 5262 in Canton, American Legion Post 316 in Woodstock, American Legion Post 29 in Marietta, Marine Corps League Detachment 1311 of Woodstock, Vet Buds, as well as female members of Unit 45 Auxiliary in Canton.

State of Homeless Veterans during COVID—Our program continued to help Homeless Veterans with short term housing during the past year and placed a number of homeless Veterans in the local Motel 6 in Canton. We also continued to work with our partner HOPE Atlanta to allow them to use our corporate discount program and together in a six month period from June 2020 to December 2020, we jointly spent over \$500,000 on housing Veterans in a six county area through the various Motel 6 hotels in and around the area north of I285 and Canton. Until we stepped in with our Motel 6 discount program, HOPE Atlanta had no access to any local hotels/motels as their primary focus for housing was working with apartment complexes to get Veterans into these units. In all the monies spent totaled more than 1,300 room nights for Veterans in need.

Food Pantry and food donation— Food became a real need during COVID and we were there with multiple food donation programs and donations to help not only Homeless Veterans in hotels, but Veterans with families. We could not have done all that we did on the food front without help from others. Trinity Presbyterian Church, SERVE, Jason Dickerson Foundation, COSTCO, and Kimberly Clark corporation to name a few provided funds, food, or needed paper products that we provided to Veterans and their families during COVID. We also want to recognize the many private donations that were made to our program like those of the Laurel Canyon Optimist Club, Canton Lions Club, Canton First United Methodist Church, as well as from friends of the program that helped us keep our programs going throughout the year.

Wrap around Services— Throughout this past year there continued to be a need for wrap around services for our Homeless Veterans and Veterans in need to include:

- **Veteran VA Claims**— We continued to work remotely with the VA and the GA Department of Veterans Services to help Veterans in need of processing claims.
- **Vehicle Donation Program**— The need for transportation by Veterans during COVID remained high and we were able to help a number of Veterans obtain donated vehicles to include disabled Veterans, a female Veteran with three children, and a Veteran who was given a bicycle rather than a car as he got a job a few blocks from where he was living.
- **Home furnishings and clothing**—Our partnerships with corporate entities like Two Men and a Truck and Arrow Exterminators lead to continuation of our program to provide Veterans, homeless or otherwise, with furniture and other needs. In January of this year, working with Arrow Exterminators and local volunteers, we were able to provide over 1,200 winter coats to local and regional Veterans and Veterans facing organizations in and around northern Georgia. Two Men and a Truck provided our program with several free furniture moves that provided needed furniture, bedding, and other household items to formerly homeless Veterans who were able to get an apartment or to Veterans with families that could not afford such items.
- **Veterans Fly Fishing program**— This was not designed to be a targeted program for Homeless Veterans, rather it was designed to be a mental health program designed to get homebound Veterans out of the house. As it turned out the first program had three former homeless Veterans from our program be part of the program. We were able to conduct the four classes on fly-fishing before COVID stopped our program, but as things opened up, Rob Hilkin and his team from the local Cohutta Chapter of Trout Unlimited were able to take a number of our graduates from the program to Frog Hollow for their day on the River.
- **Adopt a Vet program**— For the past five years our program has done the “Adopt a Vet” outreach program which is designed to focus not only on our Homeless Veteran population but also to make sure our low income Veterans and their families are able to have a holiday to include the meal and presents. Additionally, as part of the program, we spend time with our elderly Veterans in nursing homes or homebound Veterans for the holidays. This past Christmas we had to modify our program and for the first time cancel our Breakfast with Santa as well as our program to visit elderly Veterans living in the many nursing homes throughout the county. We were able to work with local corporate organizations, private citizens, and families to bring the holidays to our families in need as well as our homebound Veterans.
- **COVID Veteran Rental Assistance**— January 2021 brought a new opportunity to help Veterans on track for eviction and potential homelessness. Since the eviction moratorium was imposed late in 2020 a number of local Veterans found themselves thousands of dollars and months behind in their rent. CCHVP working with local Veteran organizations, private charities, Cherokee County Government, aggressively put a program in place to help Veterans who were renting obtain funds to help pay off back rent.

- Home Repair Program**— Veterans still had needs for home repairs during COVID and we continued to do the best we could. Home Depot Foundation went on hold during much of the year, however, they did provide us with material grants to do a few projects to include building three mobility ramps for disabled Veterans located in Canton and Woodstock. We also were able to obtain financial help for one disabled Veteran project from the Gary Sinise Foundation in California when local grants shut down. We were very humbled to have a number of the local community and Veterans come out during this time and help us complete these many projects. We also partnered with Habitat for Humanity on another project for a Veteran. We hope to again be able to do the projects in 2021.
- Shelter**—Since we started this program we have looked at the possibility of having a Veteran shelter in Cherokee County. This concept is alive and the county is looking at an overall homeless strategy for the homeless, Veterans and non-Veterans currently. More to come on this as it goes forward.



Giving a Hand Up—Programs that help our Vets

We could not have done the many programs and projects that we did during the last year without volunteers and I want to thank each and everyone who volunteered this past year. Our team currently is made up of 100% volunteers and no one in our program gets any type of payment with the exception of the great feeling they get for helping another person.

Our program does not do any Charity for the Veterans we help, we pay it forward. Every Veteran we help has earned what we do for them in recognition for their service to this country and the sacrifice they made in doing so.

I am proud of what we do and have done since our program was first started in 2014 on November 11th. Veterans Day. I am also proud that we are still have the only statue honoring Homeless Veterans in the country. Maybe someday we will solve this issue, but until we do, our program will be here to take care of them as best we can..

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Give us a call or send us an email for more information about the program.

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