

Jonesboro Homeless Prevention Project

Presently, no comprehensive system of care has been created within the Northeast Arkansas area that meets the needs of our most vulnerable population.

Homelessness or near homelessness is becoming a challenge in Northeast Arkansas. In January 2015, the Mayor appointed a Homeless Taskforce to end Homelessness. The primary goal of the taskforce is to develop a long-term strategic plan for ending homelessness. However, the taskforce was determined to attend to the immediate needs of the homeless. To that end, the Taskforce has worked together to provide for the most immediate needs of the homeless, and has developed a resource brochure for those serving the homeless as well as the near homeless through a telephone hotline that puts those in touch with the appropriate services. The Taskforce has been meeting bi-monthly for over a year, sharing strategies, benchmarks, and best practices for serving these populations.

On January 24, 2017, the Northeast Arkansas Homeless Coalition conducted a regional Point In time (PIT) count in Craighead, Greene, and Poinsett Counties. This count measures unsheltered homelessness as required by the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). However, most service providers believe, based on their work, we probably captured about one-half of the homeless population in Jonesboro and Northeast Arkansas.

The results of the Coalition count was as follows:

Unsheltered Greene County	24
Sheltered Greene County	40
Unsheltered Craighead County	21
Sheltered Craighead County	37
Unsheltered Poinsett County	0
Sheltered Poinsett County	16
TOTAL Homeless	138

In 2017, the coalition count decreased slightly from 140 to 138. However, the Jonesboro count increased by 12, that made the total Craighead count 58. That is an increase of 12.6% over 2016. Although these numbers do not represent a homeless crisis, we are well aware that a continual increase of 12.6% per year in our homeless population will put us at a homeless crisis within a few years.

Additionally, the City has one homeless shelter, the Salvation Army. The Salvation Army has 15 beds for males, five beds for females, and only two family rooms. The shelter stays full and we depend on our neighbors in Greene, Poinsett and Mississippi counties to help house our homeless. Area churches also provide 1-2 nights lodging when possible.

With this increase in homelessness and the lack of shelter beds, the jurisdiction recognizes the need to develop and implement a strong coordinated entry system that prevents families and individuals from becoming homeless and having to deal with a system that is not equipped to assist them.

The Jonesboro Grants and Community Development Department would be the best fit for this program since we have been assisting the impoverished areas of the city through CDBG funding for the last 23 years. Furthermore, we have established a center called the HUB that acts as a “one stop arena” for the homeless and others to obtain services to meet their current basic needs. This program would fill the gap for those individuals and/or families that would be in danger of losing their existing housing. The City has heavily promoted the homeless programs evolved from the Homeless Taskforce for over two years. We hope to continue these programs through federal, state and private contributions and partners to end the homelessness in the tri-county area.

Again, the City has been performing community development projects for over 20 years and has had continuum of care funds for 10 of the 23 years. Even after the City no longer had its continuum of care funds, the City continued to address the homelessness issue within the city limits. In 2014, the city officials realized the homeless problem was not only a “city issue” but also a “regional issue” that had direct impact on our surrounding counties because of the lack of services available. The formation of the Homeless Taskforce brought a serious look and solution to a crisis that had plagued the tri-county area. There has been strong support throughout the counties to eradicate homelessness in the next 10 to 15 years.

The residents of the tri-county area have proven how resourceful and big their hearts are. If this project is not funded, we will continue to move forward as we have in the past—slowly, but moving nonetheless. The City plans to allocate a portion of our CDBG funds to our homeless/homeless prevention initiative, but the larger percentage of that will go toward housing those who are already homeless and providing homeowner housing rehabilitation for those who are fortunate enough to own their home.

We will continue to do as many other cities are forced to do—put a temporary fix on the never-ending cycle of homelessness.