



HOPE ATLANTA

FIELD REPORT

MARCH 2023

An inside look at the state of
homelessness in our communities.



Dear Friend,

We all know that homelessness is a problem in Metro Atlanta and across the country. Statistics can be numbing and disheartening, and images of people experiencing homelessness can feel a world away.

That's how many of our clients felt before it happened to them. With rising costs of living and growing income inequality, too many of our neighbors are just a missed paycheck or unexpected expense away from disaster.

As we work to empower clients to permanently break the cycle of homelessness, we want to encourage community members to understand the issue and maintain a sense of compassion for the human lives affected.

This is the first in a series of quarterly field reports inviting you to take an inside look at what our teams are seeing in our community to humanize, contextualize, and localize the issue of homelessness.

Thanks for staying informed.



A handwritten signature of Julio Carrillo in black ink, written in a cursive style.

Julio Carrillo, CEO

POINT IN TIME COUNT

In January our team and I volunteered for the Point in Time (PIT) Count, an annual census of people experiencing homelessness.

This study is facilitated by **Partners for HOME**, an organization that brings together nonprofit, government, business and community leaders to combat homelessness in Atlanta. As we await the full results from the 2023 count, I want to share our experience and the stories of those we surveyed.

What is it like to participate?

Each volunteer team is randomly assigned to a designated area to conduct surveys, from emergency rooms and shelters to MARTA stations and outdoor areas where people congregate. With participants' consent, volunteers ask several anonymous (often deeply personal) questions – from demographic information to the circumstances that led them to homelessness, like substance abuse or mental or physical disabilities.

Our team was assigned to an area off Cascade Road, where we encountered about 20 unsheltered individuals. The temperature when we arrived (around 10:45 p.m.) was 35 degrees and expected to drop even more throughout the night.

What We Saw

The unsheltered individuals we encountered that January night were evenly split between men and women. Sadly, many of them were seniors.

While even one story about what led someone to homelessness is deeply troubling, we heard many. Here are some of them.

- One unsheltered man suffered from chronic health issues ranging from heart disease and diabetes to bipolar disorder.
- A 65-year-old woman was living in her car, working 12-hour shifts to save money for a deposit on an apartment.
- Many asked for gloves, hats, and blankets – anything to stay warm.

TAKING ACTION

Our Outreach Team members are a familiar presence at MARTA stations, the airport, encampments, and other places people seek shelter. They work around the clock to build trust, provide necessities like food and cold-weather items, and connect people with the resources and support they need to take the first steps out of homelessness.

WHAT IS THE PIT COUNT?

On a given night every January, volunteers in cities across the country (including Atlanta) visit designated sites in their communities to count and survey people experiencing homelessness – both sheltered and unsheltered.

While not an exact measurement, the PIT Count helps us understand the characteristics of the unsheltered population, gauge changes over time, and plan resources and solutions.

WHAT DID LAST YEAR'S PIT COUNT TELL US?

Total number of people experiencing homelessness: **2,017**

Homelessness was **reduced by 38%** since 2020

The decrease was largely due to temporary interventions taken to control the spread of COVID-19. As the pandemic eases and housing costs increase, **the number of people experiencing homelessness could rise quickly.**

COLD TEMPERATURES AND EXTREME WEATHER

As arctic air blasted much of the U.S. in late December 2022, Atlanta saw some of the coldest temperatures on record. On Christmas Eve, the Atlanta airport thermometer registered 8 degrees. January brought severe thunderstorms and tornadoes, some of which ravaged Georgia communities.

Have you ever wondered what happens to people with nowhere to shelter during extreme weather?

There are several warming stations in Atlanta, which only open when the forecast meets the criteria for warming center activation – typically when temperatures fall below 40 or 35 degrees. But staying warm for the night can be more challenging than it seems.

- Some centers are separated by gender, meaning families can't stay together.
- The centers have limited numbers of beds available.
- Participants must often submit negative COVID and/or TB screenings, which can be difficult without identification or medical resources.
- People often lack transportation to and from warming centers.

What's more: many of our clients, including those who are unsheltered, have jobs. **While some people are receptive to transportation to warming centers, others declined because they worried about getting to work the following day.**

That's why many people experiencing homelessness choose to wait out cold or extreme weather under bridges, in their cars, or in encampments.



TAKING ACTION

HOPE Atlanta and other agencies often provide emergency transportation to warming stations in winter. But since we believe being unsheltered is an emergency year-round, housing is always our first priority when we begin working with a client experiencing homelessness. **Our teams work 1-1 with clients to assist them with both temporary and permanent housing solutions** – from securing shelter beds at partner organizations like The Gateway Center to reunification with loved ones and helping securing a permanent home they can afford.

AFFORDABLE HOUSING CRISIS

We're increasingly seeing clients seeking help simply because they can no longer afford their rent despite having a job or other income source.

We spoke with one young woman who had been living in her car for five months, trying to save money to get her own place. Despite working 12-hour shifts, she had difficulty securing housing because many landlords require large deposits upfront – often 2 or 3 months' rent!

The numbers can help put this in perspective.

- The median rent for a one-room apartment in Atlanta is about \$1,500.
- More than half of Metro Atlanta workers earn less than \$40K a year.
- 36% of Americans don't have enough savings to cover a \$400 emergency.

With prices of everything from food to childcare also becoming more unaffordable, saving for a deposit is an uphill battle for many in our community. (Take a walk in their shoes by completing our [Tough Choices challenge](#)).



One veteran client came to us because he could no longer afford to stay in the home he'd lived in for five years. His rent had suddenly gone up \$600 – a considerable amount for anyone struggling to make ends meet on a fixed income.

Thanks to HOPE Atlanta we were able to help him find a more affordable housing solution and offer support services to prevent him from experiencing homelessness.



IF YOU'RE ON A FIXED INCOME, IT'S ALMOST IMPOSSIBLE TO FIND [HOUSING] YOU QUALIFY FOR.

One of my worst nightmares was being homeless."

REGINALD
HOPE Atlanta Client

TAKING ACTION

Besides working with people already experiencing homelessness, **HOPE Atlanta offers services to prevent homelessness when people fall on hard times.**

We provide rental assistance to those at risk of eviction or living in motels, including many families with children. For veterans, we offer special programs to help cover rent so they can afford to pay their bills and save money.



SOLVING HOMELESSNESS TAKES A VILLAGE.

WE CAN ALL PLAY A PART.

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