

Executive Summary

Creating Affordable Housing for the Chronically Unhoused in Pulaski County

Homelessness is a traumatic event, and the cutting-edge initiative for successfully addressing the problem of homeless people in the U.S. in 2006 was called “Housing First!” This initiative recognized that the causes of homelessness cannot be successfully treated until the fundamental needs of the individual, which include food, clothing, and shelter, are available. Once the individual has these basic needs met, he or she is much more likely to be able to focus on addressing why he or she became homeless.

We are seeing an increase in homelessness throughout Central Arkansas due to factors such as the COVID-19 pandemic and inflation. According to the [U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development’s \(HUD’s\) Annual Point in Time Count](#), nearly 570,000 people had no place to sleep on January 23, 2020 ([HUD 2020](#)). While homelessness touches all regions and demographic groups, not all people bear equal risks: research shows that people of color are disproportionately at risk of both eviction and homelessness ([Desmond and Gershenson 2016](#)). Black people compose 40 percent of those who experience homelessness in the United States, despite accounting for just 13 percent of the overall population ([Olivet et al.](#), this volume).

It is time to create a new model in Central Arkansas that will address the chronically homeless. “Chronically homeless” is defined as someone who has been homeless for at least 12 months. Alan Graham, founder of Austin’s Community First! Village, believes the underlying cause of chronic homelessness is a catastrophic loss of family and family contact. The objective is to create affordable housing for the chronically unhoused filled with a loving, compassionate, and highly hospitable community. The scope of this project will be modeled after the successful [Community First! Village](#) in Travis County, Texas – operating successfully since 2015 – with a goal to meet each individual’s most fundamental needs. The project will be a final dwelling place for these residents with a focus on their mental, physical, emotional and workforce development needs. Micro cottages, small environmentally friendly homes, will be created to house the residents. The project, located on Pulaski County land, will also contain a health clinic, land for farming, community kitchen, entrepreneur hub and other necessities to ensure growth and stability.

A 501(c)(3) non-profit organization will take the initiative in creating this model for Central Arkansas. The non-profit will work with existing organizations, such as Central Arkansas Team Care for the Homeless (CATCH), the Arkansas Homeless Coalition, The Van, Our House, Jericho Way and many other local expert service providers to ensure coordination and collaboration. There will also be a tremendous community collaboration to ensure the project achieves its vision. The non-profit will empower community individuals, organizations, schools, and businesses to create plans to ensure access for new ideas and goals. The non-profit will also be responsible for fundraising, overseeing development and coordinating volunteers and staff.

This project is an exciting new concept in providing permanent, supportive, affordable, and sustainable housing to the chronically homeless based in a loving and hospitable environment with amenities to improve the quality of life. The concept that a homeless person can best focus on the cause of his or her homelessness if his or her basic human needs are being met including a sense of being placed – a connection, loyalty, affection, identity, ownership, a location, a home, a community. We know that when people have adequate housing and have access to nutritious foods that the cost to our society, both economically and emotionally, is reduced including less need for emergency medical care and diminished use of our criminal justice system.