

Workshop 4.06 Building Productive Partnerships with First Responders



Marcy Thompson (Moderator)

mthompson@naeh.org

VP Programs and Policy, National Alliance to End Homelessness

Hillary Jones

hjones@ashevillenc.gov

REST Program Manager, Asheville Fire Department

Cole Schnieders

cschnieders@unitedwayplains.org

CoC Planning Manager, United Way of the Plains

Officer Nathan Schwiethale

nschwiethale@wichita.gov

Wichita Police Department, Homeless Outreach Team

First responders (including police, fire, and emergency medical personnel) are the first ones to receive the call when people experiencing unsheltered homelessness are in immediate danger or in crisis. Panelists will share perspectives from both first responders and homelessness response staff to promote positive interactions, system-level coordination, and safety for people experiencing unsheltered homelessness in their communities.



Positive Collaboration with First Responders

- Recognize that first responders—including police, fire, and emergency medical personnel—are a part of the community and have frequent opportunity to engage with people experiencing unsheltered homelessness
 - Can be an **important and critical partner** especially when other social services resources are scarce
- Seek to identify positive models of engagement and partnership, shared opportunities for learning, understanding of training that is needed
 - Bridge gaps between homelessness response and government public safety agencies
 - Person-centered approaches that reduce trauma
- Work towards a shared goal: **Safe and thriving community for everyone**

AFD-R.E.S.T. Program

Asheville Fire Department
Resource and
Engagement
Support
Team





Abby's Story

Before... Who Do We Call?

Encampments

- Law Enforcement
 - Criminalizing homelessness does not work when there is no where to go
 - Criminal background for things such as second degree trespass, public intoxication, etc. were serving as barriers to housing

Person Sleeping on the Sidewalk

- Fire Department, Ambulance
 - With no emergency present, trucks go back into service
 - No capacity for staff to stay with person and help them get connected to resources

Mental Health Crisis in Public Space

- Law Enforcement
 - Due to socially divergent behaviors some community members perceive the situation as unsafe
 - Most divergent behaviors not in violation of the law; ones that are, are mainly due to symptoms of their mental health distress; mental health services are answer not jail

Person Who is Unsheltered in Central Business District

- Issues being reported to City Departments
 - No official path for businesses needing support with homelessness issues
 - Several City Departments responding to an array of complaints

These gaps in services and strain on the limited resources of the first response system were reflected through growing tensions in the community

There was an increase in reports coming into City Departments about, “concerns for safety and sanitation”

A lot of focus was being shifted to the population of people experiencing homelessness

First Responders in their traditional roles were not the appropriate intervention for homeless issues

Issues surrounding homelessness in our community are complex and we need to come together as a community to form a solution

Had to get creative and reimagine public safety (Unsheltered Outreach + Firefighters)

Birth of the AFD-R.E.S.T Program

(Previously known as the Community Responder Program)

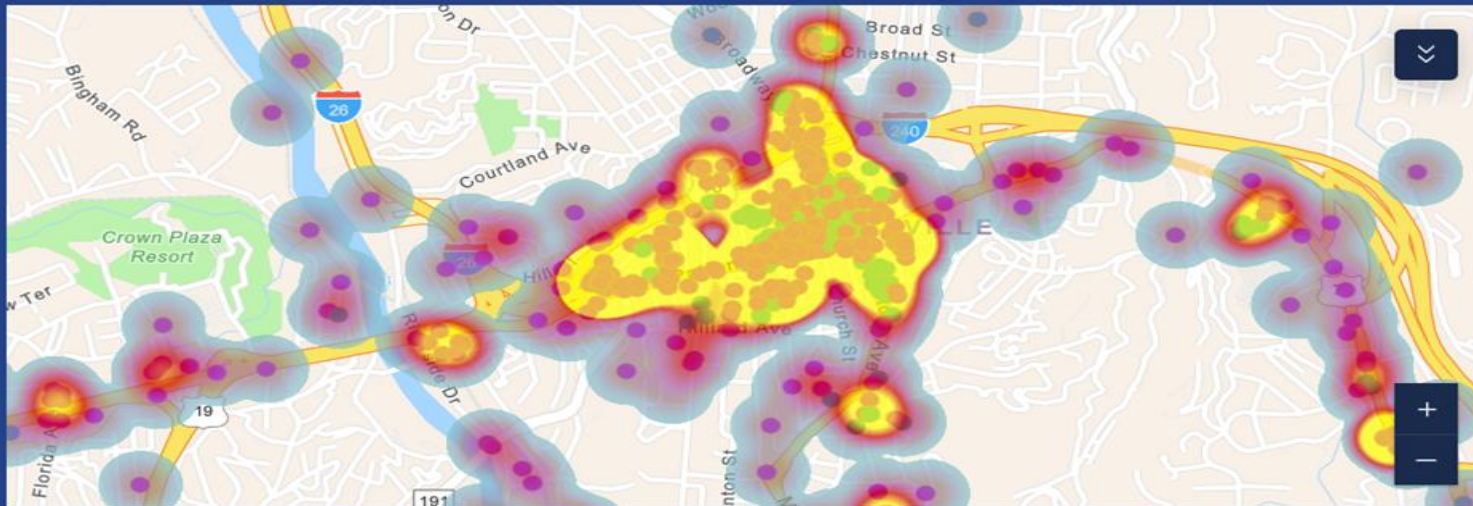
What Did We Do During the Pilot Phase?

Figured Out Ways to Best Support Our Community By....

- **Providing direct support to people who were homeless and in crisis**
 - **What do they need?**
 - **We asked them using a survey**
 - **Showed proactive support by being present 9am-9pm 7 days a week**
- **Providing direct support to local businesses and community members**
 - **Went and asked businesses their concerns**
 - **Attended neighborhood association meetings**
 - **Helped develop solutions through education and creative problem solving**
 - **Support was shown through being a listening ear and a proactive set of eyes**
- **Providing direct support to first responders through dispatch calls and encampment outreach**
 - **When R.E.S.T. gets dispatched to scene keeps other APD and AFD vehicles in service**
 - **Connected people in camps to resources and shelter options before legal complications occur**

Outcomes

- Pilot Phase from May of 2023- June of 2024
- Built positive rapport with people who were unsheltered and connected them to resources, housing and recovery paths
- City Policy was created; AFD-R.E.S.T. were first on scene to encampments
- Businesses felt supported; at the end of the year less call were coming in
- Keeping trucks in service



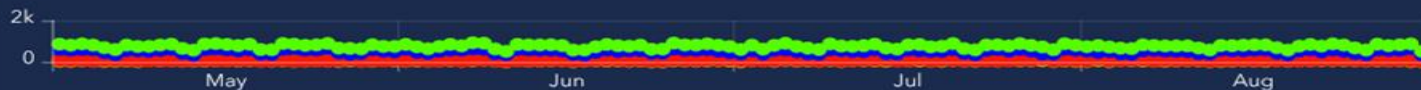
Buncombe County, NC, State of North Carolina DOT, Esri, TomTom, Garmin, SafeGraph, GeoTechnologies, Inc, METI... Powered by Esri

EVENTS PER DAY



Last update: 47 seconds ago

EMS, FIRE, LAW & TOTAL CALLS



Last update: 47 seconds ago

Total Events

1.2k



Reponsive Events

450

Proactive Events

704

Total Events: 1.2k

Events Today

0

Follow Up Events

374

Provided Bus Ticket

59



Were Resources Restored?

150

Business Response

295

Event Outcome

Not Resolved
23.83%


Situation
Resolved
51.82%

N/A 24.35%



Last update: 48 seconds ago

- As of July 1, 2024 AFD-R.E.S.T. has become an official program with the City Council passing of 2025 Fiscal Year budget
- In addition to the 5 firefighters from the pilot program, we have been awarded Opioid Settlement funds to expand the program (over half the people we serve are impacted by this)
 - Program Development Supervisor
 - Refine data collection metrics and systems
 - Instill evidence based social work practices in service delivery
 - 2 Full Time Peer Support Specialists
 - Assist in Recovery Support Services
- Scope of Work
 - 1) Enhance Public Safety for All
 - Support Gaps in Service
 - Encampment Response
 - Provide Business Support/Education
 - Return APD/AFD Apparatus to service
 - 2) Provide Direct Crisis Care
 - Connect Individuals to Resources
 - Provide for Immediate Needs
 - Build Pathways to Recovery and Housing



This made
Abby's Story
Possible



2025 INNOVATIONS & SOLUTIONS FOR ENDING UNSHELTERED HOMELESSNESS

4.06 Building Productive Partnerships with First Responders, Feb 27, 2025



United Way of the Plains

ON AND FINANCIAL STABILITY OF H CENTRAL KANSAS.

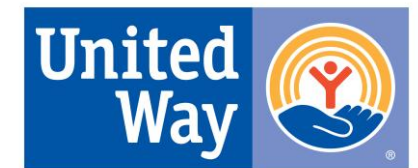


- United Way of the Plains serves as the backbone agency for the local Continuum of Care
- We manage:
 - HMIS
 - Coordinated Entry
 - CoC Grants & Compliance
- We've built up from a team of 3 in 2021 to an 11-member team (and we're hiring now for an HMIS Associate!)



WHO IS THE COALITION TO END HOMELESSNESS?

The Coalition to End Homelessness in Wichita/Sedgwick County is made up of nonprofits, local charities, government entities, businesses, people with lived experience of homelessness, and community stakeholders who want to end homelessness.



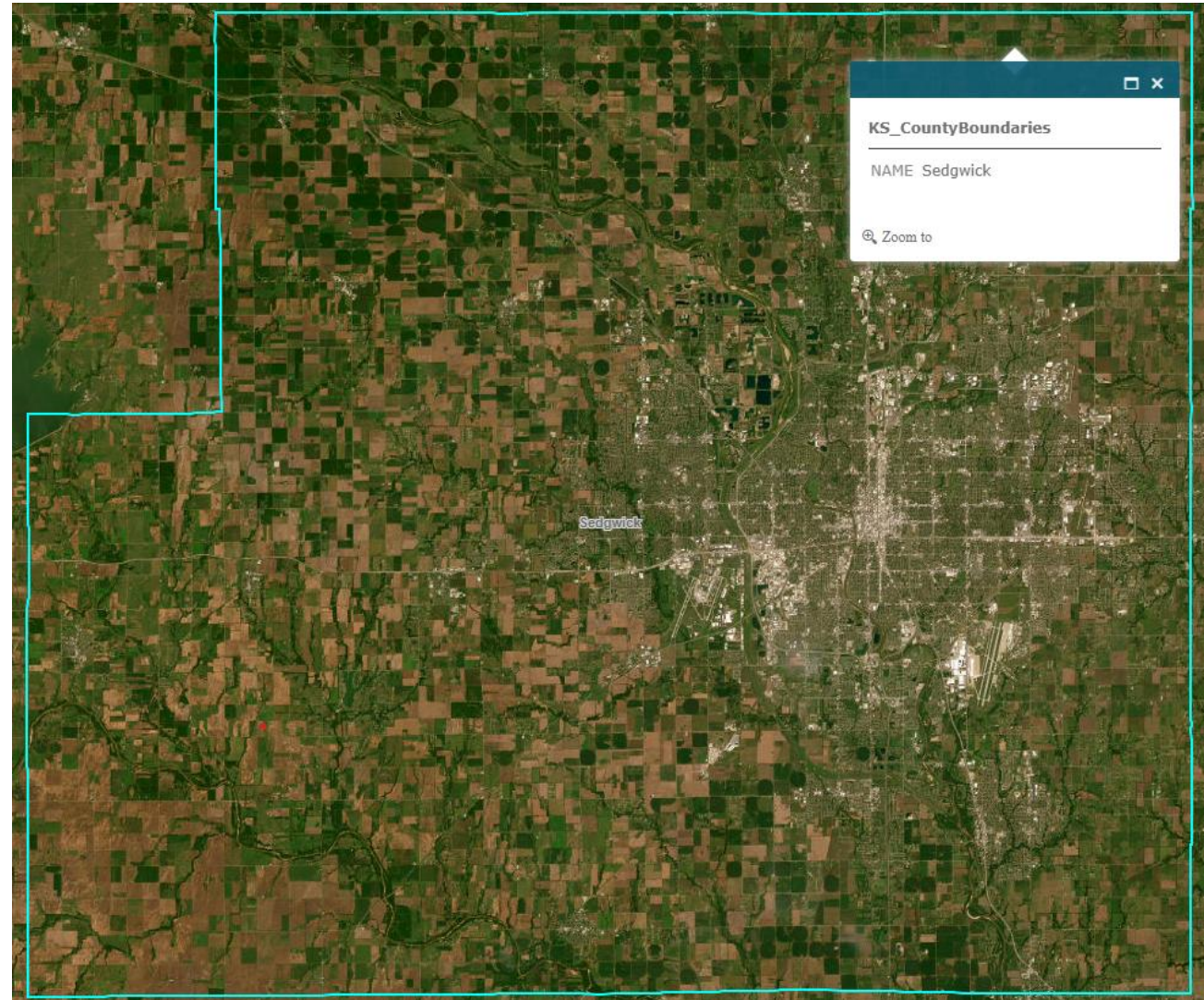
Wichita, Kansas Quick Facts:

- 48th largest US City at around ~400,000 residents
- Known as the “Air Capital of the World” for its aircraft industry
 - Known by national listicles as one of the most affordable housing markets in the US
- Birthplace of national brands like White Castle, Pizza Hut, and Coleman
- Council/Manager Government



Sedgwick County, Kansas Quick Facts:

- Around ~520,000 residents, second largest county in KS
- MSA of 790,138 in the Greater Wichita Region
- Primarily Urban, Suburban, but still maintains a strong agriculture community with many small townships
 - New development is almost all sprawl; only recently has new development started downtown Wichita
- Council/Manager Government



HOMELESSNESS IN WICHITA BY THE NUMBERS

- ▶ **2024 PIT Count:** 691 Total; 155 Unsheltered
- ▶ **By-Name List:** ~800 households actively (90 days) homeless
- ▶ **2024 CoC Award:** \$3,219,670 (~\$2.5m for housing & supportive services)
- ▶ **Population that is ALICE:**
 - ▶ **ALICE** is a United Way framework for understanding real poverty, i.e. families that are **A**sset **L**imited, **I**ncome **C**onstrained, **E**mployed):
 - ▶ 25% of Households in Sedgwick County are ALICE
 - ▶ 15% of Households meet the Federal Poverty line



Wichita Police Department



Homeless Outreach Team



Why H.O.T. was implemented



2009

384 Homeless

71 Chronic Homeless

2011

634 Homeless

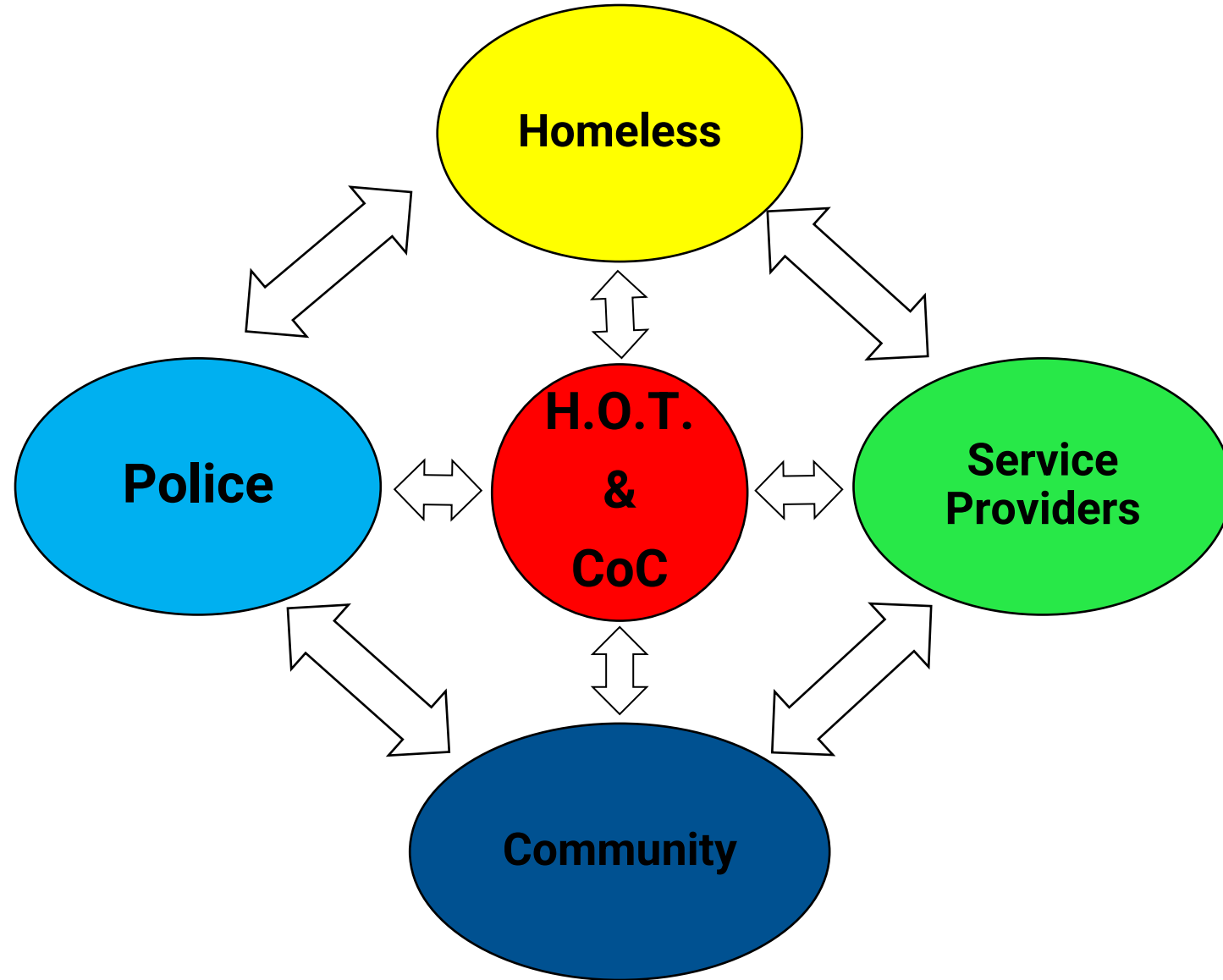
140 Chronic Homeless

65% increase in Homeless

97% increase in Chronic Homeless







Key points about a successful H.O.T. unit partnering with providers.



- ✓ **Developed and maintains a multi-agency partnership**
- ✓ **United States Interagency Council on Homelessness stated that one of the goals should be for *"Collaboration among Law Enforcement and Behavioral Health and Social Service Providers"***
- ✓ **H.O.T. answers 911 calls so they ARE patrol officers and cannot be replaced to save money.**
- ✓ **Many aspects of H.O.T. can only be done by police, not homeless providers.**
- ✓ **Importance of focused police officer efforts**





“Housing the Homeless Not Only Saves Lives – It’s Actually Cheaper Than Doing Nothing” – Huffpost



It's cheaper to give homeless men and women a permanent place to live than to leave them on the streets.

That's according to a study of an apartment complex for formerly homeless people in Charlotte, N.C., that found drastic savings on health care costs and incarceration.

Moore Place houses 85 chronically homeless adults, and was the subject of a study by the University of North Carolina Charlotte released on Monday. The study found that, in its first year, Moore Place tenants saved \$1.8 million in health care costs, with 447 fewer emergency room visits (a 78 percent reduction) and 372 fewer days in the hospital (a 79 percent reduction).

The tenants also spent 84 percent fewer days in jail, with a 78 percent drop in arrests. The reduction is largely due to a decrease in crimes related to homelessness, such as trespassing, loitering, public urination, begging and public consumption of alcohol, according to Caroline Chambre, director the Urban Ministry Center's HousingWorks, the main force behind Moore Place.

https://www.huffpost.com/entry/housing-first-homeless-charlotte_n_5022628



Economic Impacts on the City



Responsibilities of H.O.T.



- ✓ Respond to all 911 homeless related calls for service
- ✓ Respond to officer related calls for assistance
- ✓ Provide education to the community on H.O.T.
- ✓ Provide education to department members
- ✓ Fundraising for H.O.T.
- ✓ Conduct outreach within the community
- ✓ Transport clients to and from appointments
- ✓ Enforce camping ordinance with referral to shelters
- ✓ Clean up and remove abandoned camp sites
- ✓ Maintain case management database
- ✓ Maintain H.O.T. intelligence hub
- ✓ Statistician
- ✓ Case management for over 4000 individuals
- ✓ Create homeless brochures/pamphlets
- ✓ Create community partnerships
- ✓ Coordinate physical move-in with clients
- ✓ Maintain a highly flexible schedule
- ✓ Answer 40-60 phone calls a day



Responding with Nontraditional Policing



Homeless Resource Brochure



Success Stories – “Theresa”





Success Stories – “Rooster”



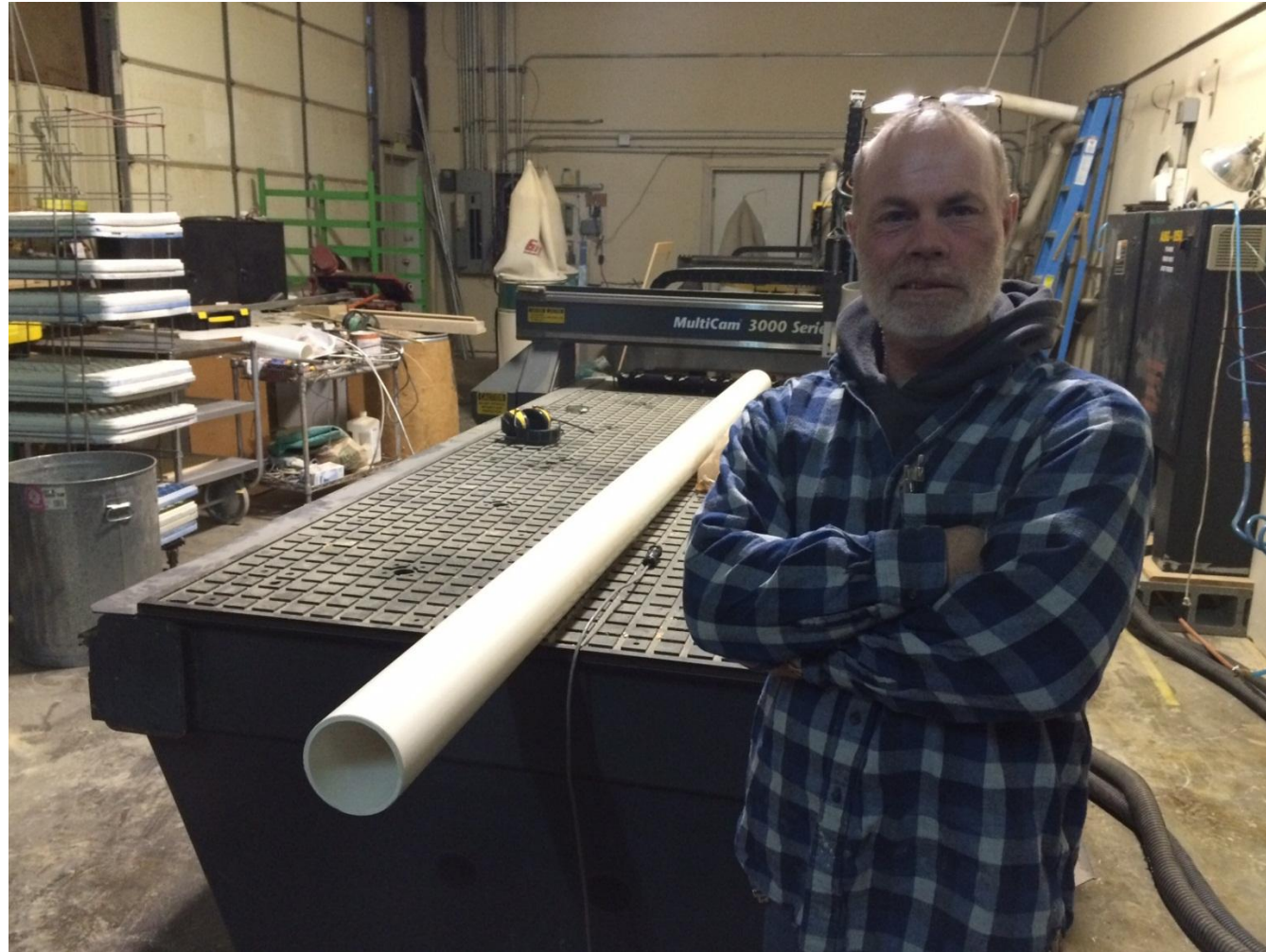
Success Stories – “Rooster”



Success Stories – “Rooster”



Success Stories – “Rooster”



Success Stories – “Rooster”



WHAT I WALKED INTO, SEPTEMBER 2021:

- ▶ A team of 4: CoC Planning Manager, HMIS Admin & 1.5 FTE support staff; no CE staff.
 - ▶ Held DV-HMIS, HMIS, CE, & Planning Grants
- ▶ A CoC focused on COVID-19 spread prevention & mitigation, not housing.
- ▶ Inactive & uninformed CoC Board; no internal institutional knowledge; limited external institutional knowledge.
- ▶ A NOFO due in 2.5 months for grant I'd never seen before.
- ▶ *A lot* of broken relationships and promises.



“WHY DOESN'T THE HOMELESS OUTREACH
TEAM HAVE ACCESS TO HMIS?”

LACEY CRUSE,
SEDGWICK COUNTY COMMISSIONER



“I DON’T KNOW.”

COLE SCHNIEDERS,
INTIMIDATED



Wichita HOT statistics (2013 – 2024)



Homeless Contacts: 33,680

911/Officer Request: 8,847

Case Management: 4,022

Referrals: 15,368

Reunited w/ family: 1,037

Homeless Meetings: 1,535

Homeless Presentations: 365

Housed: 1,676

Sheltered: 1,443

Refusals: 4,260

Job Referral: 1,262

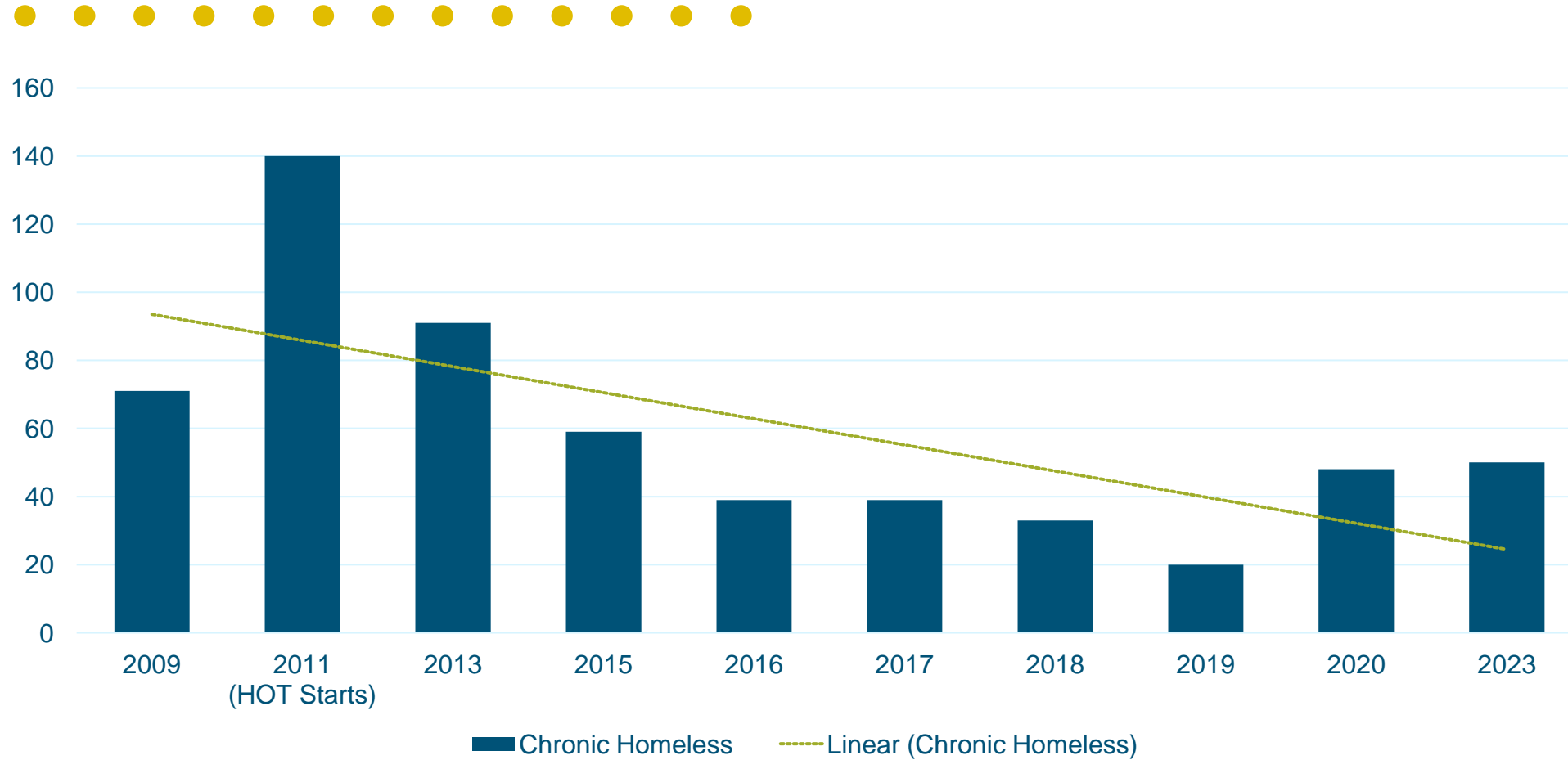
Job Placement: 294

Rehab: 211

Criminal Charges Diverted: 2,121



Wichita Statistics



Estimated Savings due to H.O.T.



Total estimated savings over 10 years:

- **\$10,570,532**
 - \$6,307 x 1,676 homeless housed¹

1. NAEH, *Ending Chronic Homelessness Saves Taxpayers Money*. <https://endhomelessness.org/resource/ending-chronic-homelessness-saves-taxpayers-money-2/>



Success Stories – “Javier”



Success Stories – “Javier”



9-year veteran, El Paso Sheriff's Dept.



Economy Hotel Plus+

Closed due to fire concerns; 88 folks facing homelessness



- United Way
- HumanKind Inn
- St. Anthony Family Shelter
- Wichita Transit
- Animal Services
- Veterans Administration
- HK Emergency Winter Shelter
- Family Promise
- Wichita Housing Authority
- Union Rescue Mission



Economy Hotel Outcomes:

Closed due to fire concerns; 88 folks facing homelessness



- 32 Accepted Help
 - 6 pets placed in emergency shelter
 - 15 families w/ minor children entered shelter
 - 6 placed into hotel via H.O.T.
 - Over \$3,000 in funds donated to help families
- 24 Self-Resolved & 32 Refused Assistance



FINAL THOUGHTS ON “UNUSUAL” PARTNERSHIPS

- ▶ If something seems at first blush wrong, counterintuitive, or broken – it probably is.
- ▶ Every rule has a reason; it’s worth regularly revisiting the *why*.
- ▶ There’s almost always a mutual end goal between housing advocates and everyone else; the trick is finding consensus on the *how*.
- ▶ If someone’s mad about the system, there’s energy to be harnessed there.
- ▶ If there’s a grassroots movement, a government project, a gathering of business leaders talking about homelessness or housing, *we need to be in the room*.



Thank You



→ wichita.gov

