Veterans Transitional Farm

Karen Pelletier

Division Director, Mecklenburg County Community Support Services

Blake Bourne

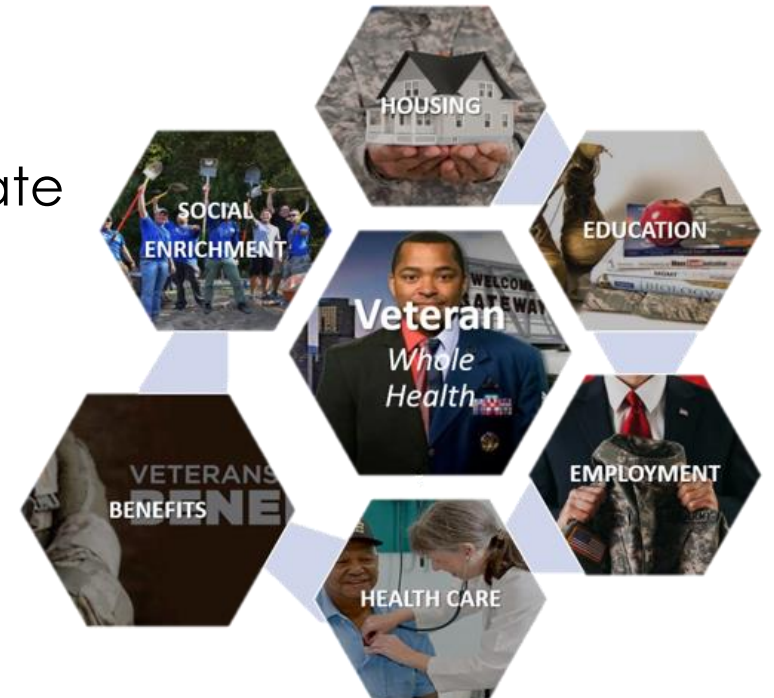Executive Director, Veterans Bridge Home
January 9, 2024

Community Support Services Veterans Services: Mission

Transform lives and community by supporting over 52,000 veterans that live, work, and recreate in Mecklenburg County through integrated service delivery that meets the need of veterans in housing, health care, education, employment, benefits, and social enrichment.

Mecklenburg County Veterans are:

- The second largest county veteran population in the state
- 87% men and 13% women
- Represented in every major conflict since WWII
- More likely to be in the labor force
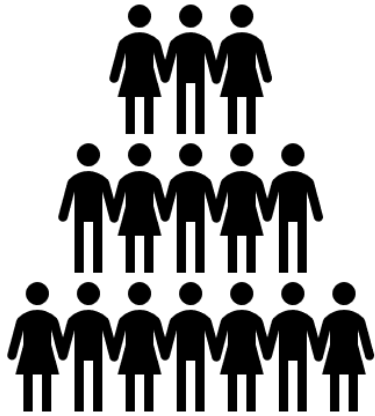
Mecklenburg County Veterans Services

Benefits

- FY23 Staff additions to meet demand – 1,947 claims filed (FY24 as of 12/15/23)
- Only county with dedicated appeals hearings onsite – $1.1M in benefits awarded since Summer 2021.
- 1 of 2 NC counties with case coordinators on site to assist in connecting to resources

Collaborating To Improve Access and Remove Barriers

- Chair the Community Veterans Engagement Board focused on removing barriers to access
- Mission CLT – Advancing initiatives to address veteran suicide
- NCCARE360/NC Serves – Care coordination
- Federal, state, and local agencies, non-profits, private business, and service providers
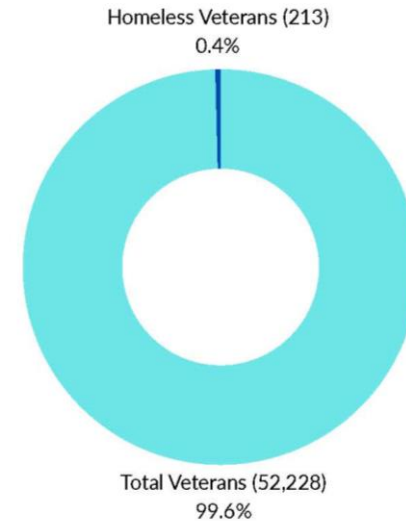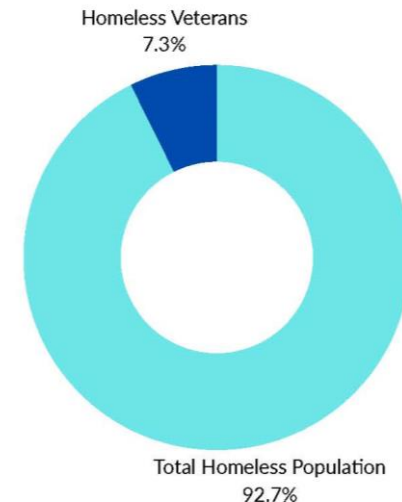
2,704

People experiencing homelessness in Charlotte-Mecklenburg

- 71% identify as Black, Indigenous, person of color

- 56% are over the age of 55

Homeless Veterans (213)
0.4%

Total Veterans (52,228)
99.6%

Homeless Veterans
7.3%

Total Homeless Population
92.7%

Mecklenburg County Veteran Homelessness

- Total # of Veterans: **52,228**

- Total # of Veterans experiencing homelessness as of June 30, 2023: **213**

Veterans make up 7% of the community's homeless population

Veterans Homelessness Priorities

Housing Stability Services: Reduce inflow of homeless veterans through housing stability and prevention services

Built for Zero System Coordinator: Drive the work forward in partnership with the workgroup and Community Solutions

Coordinated Outreach: Ensure all veterans experiencing homelessness (sheltered and unsheltered) are connected to case management services

Ensure engagement of persons with lived experience and key stakeholders in effort to end veteran homelessness

Service Providers: Increase staff retention, engagement, and military cultural competency

Implement metrics that assess the effectiveness of strategies and improvement projects to end veteran homelessness

Community Priorities for Veterans

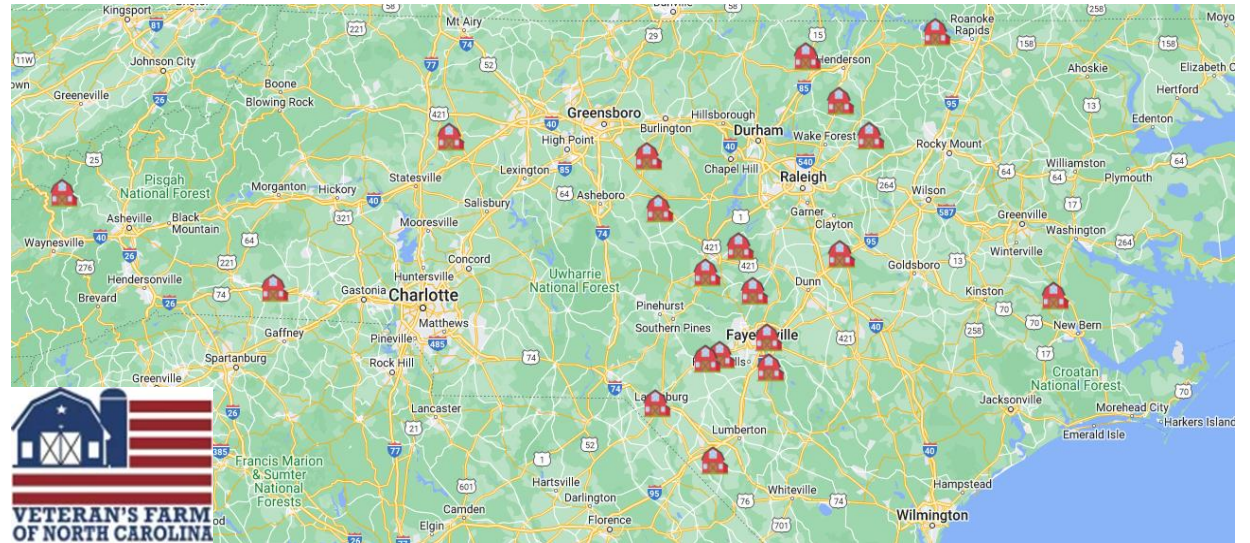|			
	Expanding universal screening: assessing circumstances and offering resources for needs		Increase community education on service and benefits by engaging education and employer partners
	Increase transportation access		Equitable access to housing
	Expand social enrichment opportunities		Define qualitative metrics for social enrichment that impact overall well-being

Veteran's Farm of North Carolina

- A farm designed and dedicated to transitioning service members and veterans of all eras to educate on all aspects of agriculture

- Primary training conducted through two programs:
  - o Veterans Agricultural Training and Education Program with the USDA
  - o Farm Military Agriculture Program (Farm MAP) – Fort Bragg Career Skills Program

- Over $300K annual operating budget - significant funding through USDA

Partners:

- US Department of Agriculture
- NC State Extension
- NC AgrAbility
- NC Agromedicine Institute
- Purina

Concerns:

- **Lacks clear goal and financial viability**: No current budget showing funding sources

- **Location**: Lack of accessible transportation to services for Veterans

- **Services**: The organization does not have the level of expertise or experience in mental health, substance use and trauma needed to provide treatment to the population and does not currently have MOUs in place with organizations to provide therapeutic services at the location

- **Lack of collaboration** with organizations currently offering employment training to Veterans to determine if the proposal meets a need in the community

- **Lack of analysis** of current labor market to determine if there will be farming opportunities after participants graduate from the program

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