



# Frequently Asked Questions

## Homelessness

For many people, homelessness is a confusing and frightening thing. The myths and stereotypes that surround it make it even more difficult to understand. We know that lots of people want to understand how something like homelessness can happen. We want to answer some basic questions.

### WHAT IS HOMELESSNESS?

The Department of Housing and Urban Development, Department of Health and Human Services, and the Department of Veterans Affairs consider a person to be homeless if they are sleeping outside, in a place not meant for human habitation such as a car or abandoned building, or in an emergency shelter or transitional housing programs. Other federal agencies have different definitions for homelessness.

### WHY ARE PEOPLE HOMELESS?

Reason varies, but the main reason people become homeless is because they cannot find housing they can afford. Other factors can include a chronic health condition, domestic violence, and systemic inequality.

Lots of people talk about the individual reasons for homelessness – losing your home in a fire, losing your job, and getting evicted, issues of substance abuse and mental illness. While these are some of the reasons, there are also systemic challenges; housing is very expensive, and some individuals have to make the difficult decision of paying for medical bills or transportation over housing.

### HOW MANY HOMELESS PEOPLE ARE THERE?

There are groups of people who experience homelessness in different ways, but all homelessness is characterized by extreme poverty coupled with a lack of stable housing. Demographics of this population may include children on their own or with their families, single adults, seniors, LGBTQ+, and veterans; they may use one service on any given day or multiple services over a long period of time. There are some who experience homelessness for various lengths of time or who experience multiple episodes of homelessness.

Chatham Savannah Authority for the Homeless estimates 712 people, including children, experienced homelessness in our community.

As of January 2023, there were 271 people living in unsheltered camps. In addition, there were 441 people who stayed that night in a local shelter.

- Of the sheltered population, 56% of the individuals identified as Black/African American and 37% identified as white. Of the unsheltered population, 55% identified as White while 36% identified as Black/African American. Majority of both groups are representative of males.
- 26% of the population acknowledge a disability.



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Some individuals who may not be counted in this number includes those who are 'doubled-up' or 'couch surfing' may also be considered homeless for eligibility for different services. While demographic differences or varying lengths in the experience of homelessness often provide important background for service providers, there is a danger in focusing on subpopulations in that resources are reserved until people become the most desperate, creating a 'race to the bottom'.

### WHY DON'T HOMELESS PEOPLE GET A JOB?

Just like the broader population, many people in the homeless community have graduated from high school and college, some have advanced graduate degrees. Many of our homeless individuals have jobs. The challenge is that the job may not pay enough to afford the cost of housing and other elements such as utilities.

### IS THERE A SOLUTION TO HOMELESSNESS?

Yes, a home! To end homelessness, the nation and our community need an adequate supply of housing that is affordable as defined by the individuals' ability. Although there are various local initiatives implementing strategies to increase the number of income-based housing options for residents, we still have a long way to go in Chatham County. Until that problem is solved, the homeless system, encompassing more than 15 local nonprofits and community-based organizations will continue to help people quickly return to housing of their choice, connect to employment, and get needed services and support.

Nothing but stable housing fundamentally differentiates those who experience homelessness and those who don't, and all people deserve the human right to housing.

### WHAT IF I HAVE IDENTIFIED A HOMELESS CAMP SITE ON MY PROPERTY?

Contact Chatham County Police Department through the non-emergency line at 912-652-6500, send notification through the website <https://police.chathamcountyga.gov/Tips> or contact CCPD through the mobile app by using the QR code below.



Property owners should ensure that they have a citizen agreement on file with the local police department. This agreement acknowledges that the property owner does not give permission for anyone to be on their premises and indicates full cooperation with law enforcement to arrest such individuals who do not comply.



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### SHOULD I GIVE MONEY TO PANDHANDLERS?

This is an individual decision. If you've got some money that you can spare, consider contributing to Give Change That County.

Asking the public for donations has been established by the Supreme Court as a constitutionally protected exercise of the First Amendment right to free speech.

Giving money to help individuals in crisis is a good thing, but so is supporting work to create systemic change so that people don't have to beg for money or food.

### WHAT CAN I DO TO HELP SUPPORT THE EFFORTS TO ADDRESS HOMELESSNESS?

Chatham/ Savannah is known for its ability to create strong public-private partnerships when addressing critical challenges in our community. Over the years, philanthropic, nonprofit, and civic leaders have provided substantial service and resources to help combat homelessness in our city, and we have begun to significantly move the needle, yet homelessness continues to be a complex and critical issue in our community.

The foundation has been laid and now, it is time to accelerate a cohesive approach based on research and evidence to ensure we are working in collaboration toward an achievable outcome. Chatham/Savannah and the Interagency Council on Homelessness all have a stake in this and a vital role to play.

We are involving the full spectrum of community partners committed to alleviating homelessness and are working to develop a comprehensive strategic plan, pulling together the lessons of the past and the best learning from around the country to guide us in making homelessness rare, brief, and non-reoccurring. Together, we can reach functional zero ensuring ALL people experiencing homelessness have equitable access to vital services, support, and housing opportunities.

For more information on how you can get involved please go to <https://www.homelessauthority.org/>.