

VA Medical Center employees participate in Manchester homelessness outreach

Authored by: Lori Flynn

MANCHESTER, N.H. – “Homeless outreach is easily the most powerful part of my job,” shared Ronald Lorek, Jr., Health Care for Homeless Veterans (HCHV) program peer support, VA Manchester Healthcare System.

Each year, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) works with agencies nationwide to conduct an annual Point-In-Time (PIT) count to gather data regarding community needs for homelessness to aid in federal funding. The Manchester Continuum of Care (MCoC) program, within HUD, organized the outreach event held Jan. 25, 2024.

At 6 a.m., a crew of 12 volunteers from Manchester VA Medical Center were in place alongside community partners to cover different areas of Manchester in search of sheltered and unsheltered homeless individuals.

Examples of sheltered homelessness are people leaving a hospital, jail, or staying in shelters, while unsheltered persons have a primary nighttime location that is typically not a place where individuals sleep, such as parks, streets, or vehicles.

“Connecting with our most vulnerable and marginalized Veterans in their own environment allows me to connect to them and build a trusting relationship,” said Lorek.

Each PIT volunteer team walked or drove different routes throughout the city to capture a single night of homelessness at a specific time. For Lorek and three other colleagues on Team 8, the walking distance consisted of four miles with face-to-face outreach.

The route focused on inner city streets and parks—areas providing a place to seek refuge from the extreme cold and wet weather during the Granite State winter season, and near community resources. The team listened with compassion, asked questions to better enhance homelessness programs, and offered resources during the PIT count.

Lorek said, “I’ve found that almost all our Veterans who are unstably housed are appreciative that someone cares enough to come see them, get to know what it is really like to be homeless, and try to find ways to help them.”

“I come away from outreach visits with more skills and knowledge to help other Veterans in the future,” added Lorek.

VA Manchester social workers and peer support teams work tirelessly to be there for Veterans and their families who are homeless or at imminent risk of homelessness. If you are a Veteran or know of a Veteran in need of access to homeless services, call the National Call Center for Homeless Veterans at 1-877-4AIDVET (1-877-424-3838).

The HUD national report on homelessness is slated to be released later in the year.



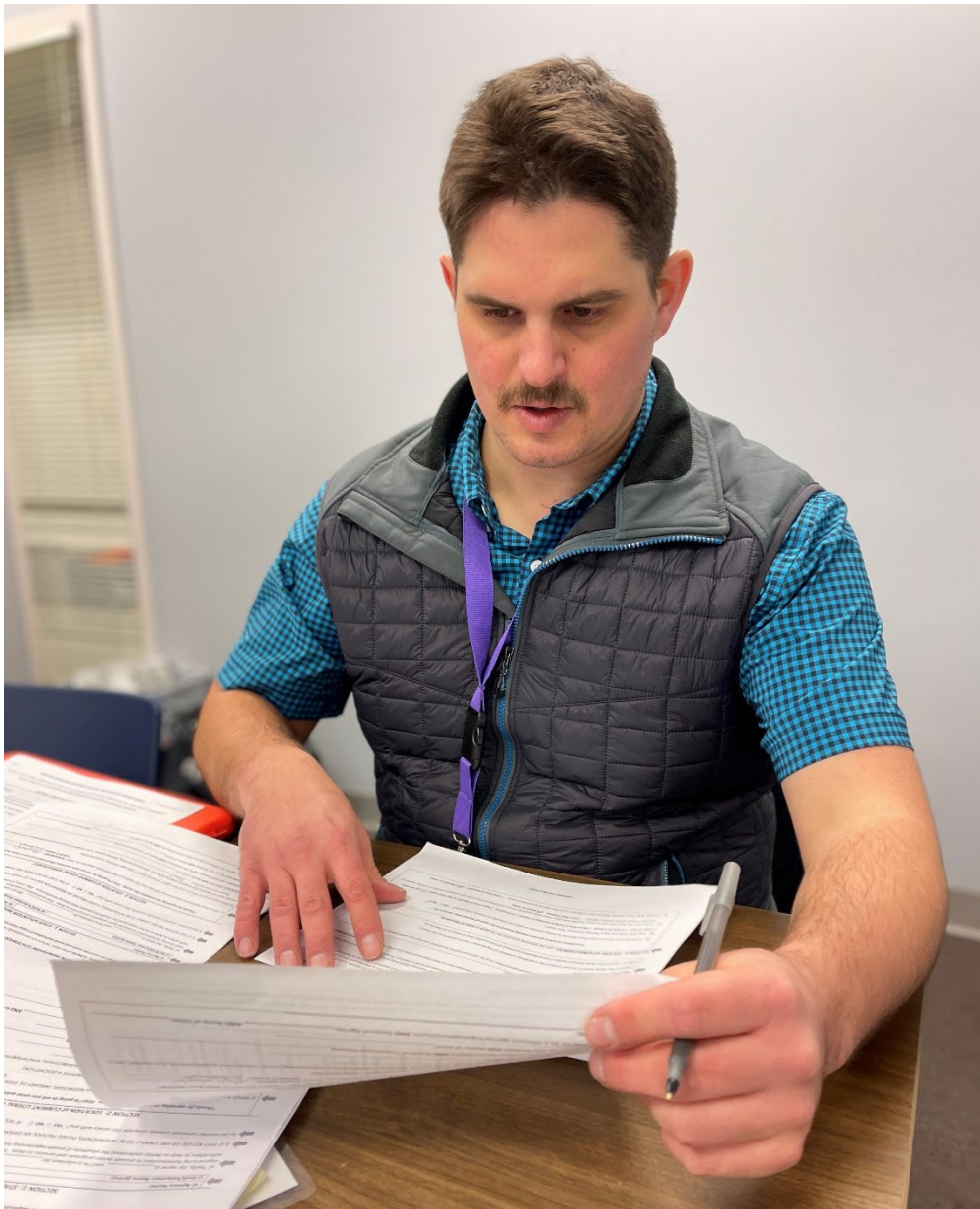
VA Manchester volunteers Kristen Goodridge, Ronald Lorek, Jr., and team lead Travis Palmer review their walking route for the annual U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development Point-In-Time homeless count in Manchester, N.H., Jan. 25, 2024. (Photo by Lori Flynn PAO, VA Manchester)



VA Manchester volunteers participating in outreach offer support and provided handwarmers to a homeless individual during the annual Point-in-Time count in Manchester, N.H., Jan. 25, 2024. (Photo by Lori Flynn PAO, VA Manchester)



On Jan. 25, 2024, VA Manchester employees provide outreach to a homeless couple trying to stay warm and seek shelter on a park bench. The team is gathering data to enhance homeless programs and services, while offering support and assistance to the couple during the Point-In-Time count in Manchester, N.H. (Photo by Lori Flynn PAO, VA Manchester)



Ronald Lorek, Jr., Health Care for Homeless Veterans program peer support, with VA Manchester, finalizes data sheets collected from homeless individuals during the annual U.S. Department of Urban Housing and Development Point-in-Time count, Jan. 25, 2024, in Manchester, N.H. (Photo by Lori Flynn PAO, VA Manchester)