



Executive Summary 2020

UCHRA Van Buren County Head Start

Service and Recruitment Area:

There were no major changes to the service and recruitment area. Van Buren County is a very rural, mountainous area located in Middle Tennessee. In 1991 (the inception of Head Start within this county), the location of the center was based on structure availability, which was across the mountain from the only town. Our region is a rural farming area and services are not readily available to the entire community. Transportation is a dire need, is costly and very limited. One of our long-range goals is to relocate the Center to a more centralized location within the Spencer city limits, as funding becomes available. This would ensure that our services were more easily accessible to the entire service area. The county and the seat are geographically isolated. Total land area (2000): 273.46 sq. miles.

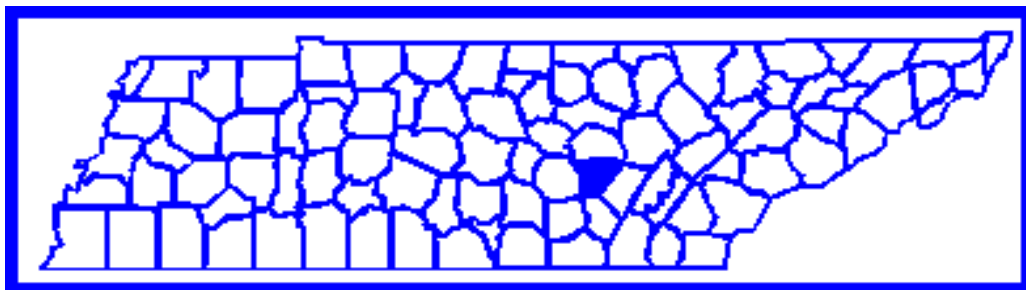
Needs of Children and Families

Van Buren County remains an isolated, poverty stricken area. There are few jobs, little affordable housing, drug and alcohol addiction, transportation issues, lack of health care, and is basically a food desert.

There is a total of 5.1% of the total population aged 0 to 5, as estimated from the last US Census (2010). UCHRA gives priority to children with disabilities, children who are homeless, in foster care, or are below the poverty threshold. Children with disabilities will participate with their peers in the inclusive Head Start classroom, receiving services as determined by their IEP. The needs of dual language learners are addressed through classroom instruction being provided through the home language when possible (Spanish is the only language

encountered by the program to date). Two bi-lingual staff on site assist in this process. Families are encouraged to continue to develop skills in English and their home language. Research shows the importance of intentionally supporting families in the process of learning English along with the home language is very helpful for young children.

Our program has systems in place to address adult education through a program implemented by the State of Tennessee funded through lottery dollars, allowing for obtaining high school equivalency or a 2 year degree/ certification at no cost. Because of the problems associated with such a rural, isolated community, the families of Van Buren County continue to struggle. People are pressed to find work, to have transportation to get to work, and to afford that transportation. There is little employment in the county, so there is no choice but to go outside the county for work. The closest work possibilities are between 16 and 31+ miles away, in any direction. COVID 19 has cut work as well, with many jobs laid off or eliminated altogether. Many jobs are low paying, so families do not have much left after paying transportation costs. COVID 19 has affected food costs, which are skyrocketing. Health care costs, with many having no coverage at all, as well as housing costs, continue to climb unabated.



The prescription opioid epidemic is damaging to the community and its residents in multiple ways. Users are having their lives, and those of their families, severely disrupted or are, in fact, losing their lives as a result of their abuse. The Upper Cumberland area is also losing the economic benefits associated with a healthy workforce as productivity is lost and taxpayer dollars are expended to pay for expensive hospital visits, incarceration, and the custody of children. In 2016, 34.5% of children born in Van Buren County suffered Neonatal Abstinence

Syndrome, where children are exposed to drugs in utero. Newborn infants suffer withdrawal symptoms from the drugs their mothers exposed them to before birth. It can be opioids, or methamphetamines or heroin, both which are making a resurgence in the Upper Cumberland area. Experts still do not understand the ramifications for these children in their future. Youth drug and alcohol abuse continues to be an issue.



Families in this area, and all along the UC, rely heavily on social safety net programs such as LIHEAP (a program to help with heating and cooling costs) and SNAP benefits to survive. People are finding they need more as costs continue to rise, and COVID 19 has compounded the problems. Head Start families and the other citizens of the county are concerned over the lack of health care, dental and eye care, and employment. Since Tennessee refused to expand Medicaid, many are left still without any health care.

The COVID 19 pandemic has had a profound impact on the community. The school system closed early (March 17, 2020), but Head Start continued to serve the children, their families and the community. We made available Home Educational Activities for parents to work with their children at home, as well as food. We implemented the Summer Enrichment Program and had 21 participants. A survey was sent to parents to inquire if they wished to participate. Out of 21 who accepted, 4 opted for homebound services where materials were dropped off and picked up. 17 had classroom instruction. At the end of the program, children were functioning at 85% above age level. This program ran from June 1 to June 26, 2020.