



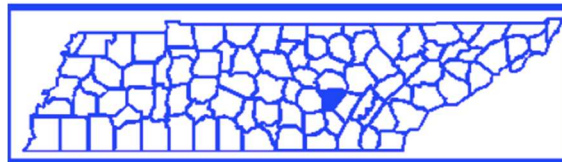
Executive Summary 2021 UCHRA Van Buren County Head Start

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, so transportation is a dire need, costly and very limited. One of the long-range



goals is the relocation of the center to a more centralized location within the Spencer city limits, as funding is available. This will enable our services to be more easily accessible to the entire service content area. The county and the seat are geographically isolated. Total Land Area (2000): 273.46 sq. miles. Additionally, the Amish population has migrated and owns 4000 square acres, which is a large portion of Van Buren County. This community sits in the middle of the service delivery area. Our community data will reflect a fluctuation of children

who are age eligible for Head Start, but Amish parents choose to educate their children at home in accordance with their cultural beliefs.



Needs of Children and Families:

The changes to data collected by the community assessment process are as follows: Male involvement in the program has been a struggle due to COVID 19, but we will continue to implement the model that has worked successfully in the past. Adding additional teacher aides to the classroom has reduced the need for staff to abandon their job duties to assist with behavior related issues.

According to the U. S. Census Bureau, 5.7% of Van Buren County's total population is children ages zero to five. UCHRA Van Buren County Head Start gives priority to children with disabilities, children who are homeless, in foster care, or 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 primary language encountered by the program to date. 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 English and the home language with 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 obtaining High School Equivalency, 2-year degree or certification at no cost to the individual. 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. Employment is extremely limited in the county, so there is no choice but going to neighboring towns and counties. The closest work possibilities are between 16 and 31+ miles away, in any direction. Food, health care, and housing costs have continued to skyrocket while wages have stagnated. There are still no jobs becoming available in the community in the foreseeable future. Other counties are a long distance away, and minimum wage jobs do not pay enough to make up for the increased travel expenses. COVID 19 has affected food costs, which continue to skyrocket.



The misuse and abuse of prescription opioids has continually grown as a major threat to the health and well-being of the Upper Cumberland area. The prescription opioid epidemic is damaging to the community and its residents in multiple ways. Users are having their lives severely disrupted, or are losing their lives, as a result of their abuse. Upper Cumberland 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 custody of children. Another consequence of the prescription drug epidemic that has been detrimental in our area is that 34.5 percent of children born in Van Buren County suffer Neonatal Abstinence Syndrome. Neonatal Abstinence Syndrome is a condition in which a newborn has withdrawal symptoms after being exposed to certain substances in utero. Many times, the newborn is exposed when the mother uses substances such as medications or illicit drugs during pregnancy and after the baby is born, the baby goes through withdrawal. The drug problems, particularly methamphetamine and now heroin, have had resurgence across the Upper Cumberland area. Professionals still do not understand the future ramifications of children being exposed to these drugs being manufactured in their homes. Youth drug and alcohol abuse as well as adult alcohol abuse continues to be a concern for the community. Families in the community increasingly rely on community programs such as food SNAP and LIHEAP. Programs helping low income families are being slashed and families are suffering even more. Early child care is desperately needed; there is no childcare for children aged 0-3 years old provided in Van Buren County. Citizens as well as the families we serve are also concerned about lack of affordable health insurance, affordable and accessible medical care, and employment for adults and teens. Since the State of Tennessee chose not to expand Medicaid,

many low-income people still do not have access to health coverage. In the state of Tennessee children of low-income families have access to insurance through the Tenn Care insurance program. Most adults in the service area as well as across the state do not have access to a state provided Medicaid system and must rely on Obama care to address this need, which has income stipulations our families do not meet. There is no dentist in Van Buren County, and children needing intensive treatment must travel long distances to receive these services. The COVID 19 virus has also taken a toll on this stressed area.