



UCHRA Van Buren County Head Start

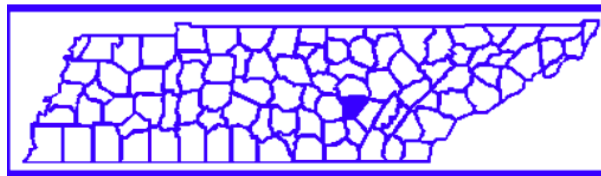
Executive Summary 2026

Service and Recruitment Area: The service and recruitment area has been approved for Van Buren County. Our community confronts geographical challenges in offering the educational opportunities that young children need in order to flourish. With a total land area of 275 square miles of mountain range, valleys and winding gorges. The county has few homes and the population density is very low. Parents and busses are required to transport enrolled children from the small town of Spencer down one side of a curvy, steep, narrow and deteriorated



mountain road with a small valley before you encounter the other side which entails the same type of terrain before reaching the center at the top of what is known as “Mooneyham Mountain”. This rigorous trip two times a day, five days a week is a must in Van Buren County to ensure enrollment and attendance of the children in highest need.

Upper Cumberland Human Resource Agency Van Buren County Head Start program provides services through a center-based option to include but not limited to the size of the service area and as indicated in the Community Assessment to meet the family's needs to obtain work, training to work, and lack of child care to hold jobs.



Needs of Children and Families:

Selection is the formal process for considering all eligible applicants and selecting children and their families into the program. Head Start requires that programs select children and families who have the greatest need based on selection criteria. While young children with special needs receive special recruitment efforts and some priority for enrollment, they still must meet the Head Start guidelines and be considered within the framework of the selection criteria rating process.

According to the community assessment 5.5% of Van Buren County's [total population is children ages zero to five years of age](#). In Van Buren County the population is very diverse. The languages spoken in Van Buren County consist of 94.8% English, 3.8% Indo-European and 1.2% Spanish. Spanish is the primary secondary language encountered by the program to

date. In the 2024-2025 school year, 17% of students in Van Buren County Schools were experiencing homelessness. With no access in the county to homeless shelters, the target the program addresses is homeless with a roof. In 2025 it was reported by the Van Buren County School System that fewer than 10 children were in foster care in the county who would be eligible for Head Start/Early Head Start.

Upper Cumberland Human Resource Agency 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 Head Start classroom receiving services as determined by their IEP.

(ii) Upper Cumberland Human Resource Agency Van Buren County Head Start only services children ages 3 to 5 years, but when dealing with families of children enrolled in the program who are pregnant, does offer numerous resources for pregnant women to ensure a healthy pregnancy. Our program has systems in place to address adult education through a program implemented by the State of Tennessee funded through lottery dollars allowing a person to obtain a High School Equivalency, a 2-year degree, or certification at no cost to the individual. Citizens as well as the families we serve are also concerned about the lack of affordable health insurance, affordable and accessible medical care. The program does help families apply for affordable health care after the initial meeting occurs.

2025-2026 Family surveys, which are conducted at the beginning of each program year, show the top 3 areas of concern, which are indicated as families in crisis, as follows:

- Food: Many people rely heavily on programs such as WIC and SNAP, which often leaves them short by the end of the month. To aid in addressing this problem and help fill in the gap parents are encouraged to use the Commodity program administered by the grantee, Bread for Life Ministries, Second Harvest ministries, and the food bank on-site maintained by the program. Additionally, the program partners with other community programs to provide a snack pack service to enrolled children.
- Employment: Employment is a significant area of concern for many families participating in Head Start. Caregivers often face barriers such as limited job opportunities, unstable or low-wage work, lack of affordable childcare, transportation challenges, and inflexible work schedules. These issues can make it difficult for families to achieve financial stability, even when they are motivated to work or pursue education and training.

Upper Cumberland Human Resource Agency Van Buren County Head Start program frequently identifies employment needs through family assessments and work with families to connect them to job training, education, career counseling, and community resources that support long-term economic self-sufficiency.

- On-Going Health Issues: Ongoing family health issues are a significant concern for many Head Start parents. Chronic illness, mental health challenges, and ongoing medical needs within the family can create emotional, physical, and financial stress. Parents struggle to balance medical appointments, caregiving responsibilities, and work obligations, which can impact family stability and daily routines.

These ongoing health concerns can also affect a child's attendance, engagement, and overall well-being. Head Start programs recognize the importance of addressing family health needs by partnering with parents to connect them to medical homes, mental health supports, and community health resources. By supporting families as they navigate long-term health challenges, Head Start helps promote healthier, more stable environments where children can thrive.

(iii) Early child care for children from birth to three is hard to find in our area. The only early child care can be found through family members or friends of family. Two public pre-K

programs are present in our community and can only serve only up to ninety children. Early child care is desperately needed in this rural area; there is no childcare for children aged 0-3 years old provided in Van Buren County.