



Hope Atlanta  
FIELD REPORT  
JUNE 2025



## A LETTER FROM OUR CEO

# Why Now Matters More than Ever

Dear Friends,

Thank you for continuing this journey with us as we work to lift up the stories, strategies, and systems shaping Atlanta's response to homelessness. In this edition, we're proud to share insights that spotlight the challenges and progress revealed in the 2025 Atlanta Point-in-Time (PIT) Count, as well as articles that highlight what's working—and what still needs to change.

The PIT Count is more than a number. It's a snapshot of who is unhoused on a single night and the broader systemic factors at play. Led by Partners for HOME and supported by volunteers, service providers, and the Atlanta Continuum of Care, this year's count identified 2,867 individuals experiencing homelessness in Atlanta—a 7% increase since 2020. While chronic homelessness dropped by 9% and youth and veteran homelessness declined, the count also revealed a 14% rise in family homelessness and a steady rate of unsheltered individuals.

These findings deepen our understanding of community needs and reinforce the importance of targeted, data-driven solutions. At Hope Atlanta, we're proud to serve not only as a direct service provider, but also as a partner and convener of innovative approaches. From rapid rehousing with behavioral health supports to encampment-to-housing pathways and community-based wraparound services, we're helping to turn PIT data into action—and outcomes.

Our coverage in this issue includes stories of place-based strategies in neighborhoods, where coordinated investments are creating lasting impact. You'll read about how we can build on what's working—by scaling up proven models, listening to those with lived experience, and ensuring every solution centers dignity, belonging, and stability.

We invite you to explore these stories, share them, and engage with the work. The path forward will require all of us—policymakers, service providers, advocates, and neighbors—to lean in, speak up, and act with urgency. Because when hope meets action, change happens.

In partnership,



Julio Carrillo, CEO







## LEANING INTO PIT INSIGHTS

# Driving Innovation with Hope Atlanta

Each January, Atlanta mobilizes hundreds of volunteers, service providers, and community groups to carry out the Point-in-Time (PIT) Count—a federally mandated snapshot of our homelessness landscape. This year's count, conducted January 27–28 for the city and January 22–23 in Fulton County, identified **2,867 individuals experiencing homelessness in Atlanta**—a 7% increase from January 2020. Yet amid this rise, the data shows room for real progress:



Chronic homelessness dropped by **9%**, evidence of effective outreach and housing strategies



Family homelessness rose by **14%**, or roughly 400 people, and unsheltered individuals remained steady.



Veteran homelessness declined by **3%**



Youth homelessness declined by **6%**

These figures hold more than just information—they point to where we must double down and where we've made headway. Hope Atlanta is stepping up as a partner and convener in translating these insights into action. Through strategic collaborations with the Continuum of Care, local nonprofits, and government, Hope Atlanta is:

1. Leveraging rapid rehousing with behavioral health integration, ensuring individuals receive the support they need—not just housing.
2. Converting PIT data into targeted outreach, focusing on families and chronically unhoused individuals to reinvest them into stable housing faster.

As chronic homelessness shrinks and families rise, our interventions must evolve—expanding affordable housing, increasing supportive resources, and involving those with lived experience in designing solutions.

Hope Atlanta's role as convener is critical. By bringing together government, providers, residents, and funders, they create the space for innovation: integrating service models, piloting encampment-to-housing programs, and tracking outcomes using PIT data.

We're at a pivotal moment. The drop in chronic and youth homelessness signals what's possible. Yet the spike among families calls for urgency. With data-informed collaboration fueled by Hope Atlanta's leadership, Atlanta has the opportunity to address gaps, scale what works, and reclaim hope for every neighbor experiencing homelessness.

## HOUSING IS HEALTH CARE

# Hope Atlanta Is Redefining Behavioral Health for People Experiencing Homelessness

At Hope Atlanta, we are building a behavioral health program rooted in the realities of homelessness, where safety, stability, and trust must come first. Traditional outpatient models assume a baseline of security. But for someone living on the streets or in survival mode, behavioral health needs are often overshadowed by more urgent concerns: Where will I sleep tonight? When will I eat next? Who will see me as human?

At Hope Atlanta, trauma-informed care is not a stand-alone intervention, it is a foundational framework that shapes every element of our behavioral health program for individuals experiencing homelessness. Recognizing the pervasive impact of trauma, we intentionally embed trauma-informed principles throughout our organizational culture, service delivery, and client engagement strategies.

### Meeting People Where They Are—Literally

Unlike conventional behavioral health systems that operate from clinics or offices, our program begins with outreach. We take services to the places where clients already are—whether that's an encampment, a housing program like The Melody, or a drop-in center.

We intentionally embed behavioral health services into housing programs—not as separate or stigmatized offerings, but as natural extensions of the support we provide. Sometimes it's a quick hallway chat. Other times it's a full therapy session. The key is flexibility and trust. We recognize the lasting impact of trauma and prioritize building trust through consistent, respectful, and compassionate care. This approach shapes every interaction and informs all clinical and programmatic decisions.



At the heart of Hope Atlanta's Behavioral Health Department are two exceptional leaders: Kala Farrare and Abi Thomas-George, LCSW. Together, they bring decades of experience, deep compassion, and strategic vision to our work supporting neighbors navigating behavioral health challenges.



Kala Farrare, MSW, began her journey in human services in 2009 and has since led programs spanning foster care, juvenile justice, education, and clinical care. With leadership experience in Maryland and Georgia—including roles as Chief Clinical Officer and Behavioral Health Surveyor for CARF—Kala now serves on Hope Atlanta's Behavioral Health team with a focus on high-quality, trauma-informed care and integrated service delivery.

Abi Thomas-George, LCSW, is a proud Jackson State University alum whose behavioral health journey began with courage and a deep desire to help others. From her first role post-college to her current position as Clinical Director, Abi has shaped behavioral health programs across the country, always grounded in her personal motto: "It can be anyone, and it can be me." Her leadership centers on mentoring teams, building compassionate systems of care, and ensuring every person served is met with dignity and hope.



# Core Strategies

Operating trauma-informed care at every stage of the client journey.



PHYSICAL AND EMOTIONAL SAFETY



CULTURAL COMPETENCY & HUMILITY



RAPPORT BUILDING



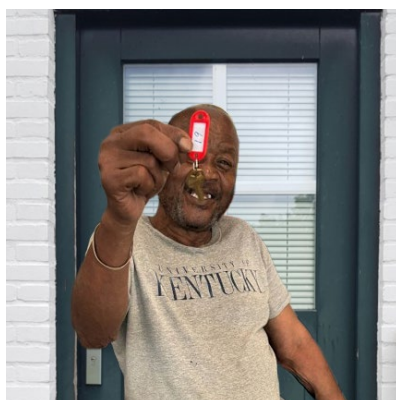
SELF-DETERMINATION & EMPOWERMENT



STAFF WELLNESS & SUPPORT

## HOUSING FIRST

### Housing as the Foundation for Mental Health



We embrace a “Housing First” model, where housing stabilization is not contingent upon treatment compliance or sobriety. Permanent supportive housing is the cornerstone of mental health stabilization for individuals experiencing chronic homelessness. At The Melody, stable housing offers more than just a roof—it provides safety, consistency, and dignity, all of which are essential for healing. When a person no longer has to worry about where they’ll sleep or how they’ll survive each day, they can begin to focus on their health, relationships, and long-term goals. Clients can engage at their own pace, with staff they know and trust, often without even realizing they’re participating in formal mental health services. This normalization and integration reduce stigma and increases uptake.

Housing creates conditions in which behavioral health care can take root. It allows for regular contact with providers, better medication adherence, improved sleep and nutrition, and a sense of ownership over one’s life. In short, housing is health care, and at The Melody, it’s where healing begins. Rather than requiring formal clinical settings or immediate disclosures, we offer support through relationship-based engagement. This includes informal check-ins, peer support, community activities, and co-located services that are easy to access without pressure or labels.



## GLORIA'S STORY

# Lived Experience Is a Job Qualification



Certified Peer Support Specialists are essential to our care model. These are individuals with lived experience of homelessness, mental illness, or substance use—now trained to support others walking similar paths.

Peers offer what clinicians sometimes can't: instant credibility and connection. Their presence signals that recovery is possible and that clients are not alone. They help lower barriers, build trust, and serve as bridges between clinical services and real-life resilience. Many of the individuals we serve have endured deep trauma, systemic failures, and institutional mistrust. Peers who have walked similar paths can engage with clients in a way that feels safe, relatable, and empowering.

Their presence enhances the entire care team by providing first-hand understanding of the complexities of homelessness, mental health, and substance use—ensuring that our services remain grounded, person-centered, and truly responsive to the needs of our clients.

Gloria Woodard, Marta Hope Case Manager, is a Certified Peer Specialist and sees the impact of her work every day, “When someone says, ‘You don’t know what I’m going through,’ I tell them—I do know. I’ve been there. I’m a Certified Peer Support Specialist. I’ve battled addiction. I’ve experienced homelessness. I’ve been incarcerated. That’s what opens the door. They stop, they look, and they say, ‘Okay—what do you have for me?’ That connection is everything.”

Gloria added, “When they realize you’ve walked in their shoes, they open up like a book. This work is about dignity. It’s about knowing their names, remembering their stories, and helping them believe a better life is possible. I’ve had people tell me, ‘I want to get where Ms. Gloria is.’ That’s what lived experience can do—it gives people hope they can make it, too.”

## The Future We’re Building

Hope Atlanta is not just adding a behavioral health department—we’re reimagining what it means to care for people who have been left behind. By centering housing, humanity, and hope, we’re creating a model that others can follow and, most importantly, that clients can trust.

Because when the first step is housing,  
everything else becomes *possible.*

# The Case for a Neighborhood-Focused Response

## Why Hope Atlanta Is Investing in Place-Based Strategy

Neighborhoods shape everything—from housing access and job opportunities to mental health outcomes and generational wealth. In fact, a person's ZIP code is one of the strongest predictors of their health—even more than their genetic code.

That's why Hope Atlanta has adopted a Place-Based Strategy that aligns housing, behavioral health, transportation, and employment resources based on the specific needs of each neighborhood.

## What We Know:

- In Buckhead and Midtown, high housing costs displace low-income renters
- On the Westside and South Atlanta, housing may be available, but supportive services are not
- Resource deserts lack access to transportation, healthcare, or mental health care—barriers that deepen instability

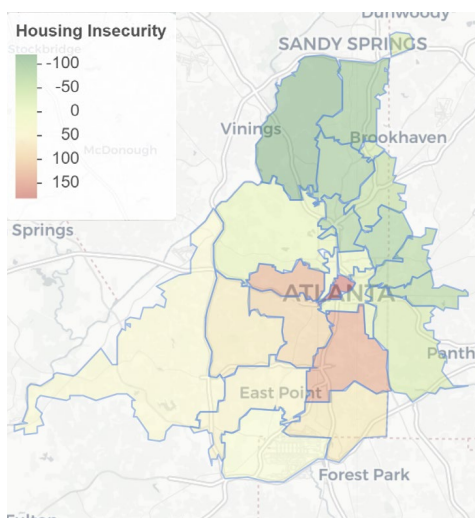
By focusing on high-need, low-resource neighborhoods, we're working to level the playing field and close the gaps that fuel homelessness.

## How We're Doing It:

- Tailoring housing solutions through partnerships with affordable housing developers and eviction prevention teams
- Expanding behavioral health care where services are scarce—through mobile outreach and embedded clinicians
- Building community networks that foster social connection and long-term stability
- Launching service hubs at key affordable housing sites to bundle wraparound services where people already live
- Engaging trusted, neighborhood-specific partners in workforce development, legal aid, and healthcare
- Improving coordination of fragmented systems to avoid duplication and make services easier to navigate



By rooting our work in community—and data—we're creating a more just, more effective model of care.



Hope Atlanta partnered with a graduate research team from Georgia State University to conduct a Housing Insecurity ZIP Code and Census Tract Analysis for the City of Atlanta. The project aimed to identify areas of highest need to help guide Hope Atlanta's future program expansion. Using a literature-informed housing insecurity index that incorporated six weighted variables, the team analyzed and ranked every ZIP code and census tract within the city. The results revealed five priority ZIP codes—30303, 30315, 30314, 30310, and 30311—and top census tracts including Thomasville Heights, Adamsville, Mechanicsville/Summerhill/Peoplestown, Bankhead, and The Villages at Carver. The team also developed an interactive heatmap with overlays showing service providers and available resources, enabling Hope Atlanta to identify both service gaps and potential local partners. This data-driven tool is now helping us target our interventions where they're needed most—and informing our place-based strategy to prevent and end housing insecurity across Atlanta.

# Homelessness is Growing—And Changing

You may have noticed it, too. The person outside your grocery store. Sleeping in a car in your office lot. Sitting quietly at your train station. Homelessness in Atlanta is no longer confined to downtown. It's more visible—and more varied—than ever.

One of the biggest misconceptions about homelessness is that it's mostly caused by mental illness or substance use. While those issues can certainly be part of the story, they are not the full story—especially for families. As seen in the PIT Count with a 14% rise in family homelessness and a steady rate of unsheltered individuals.

Behind every neighbor experiencing homelessness is a family doing everything they can to stay afloat:

- A mom picking up extra shifts
- A child switching schools mid-year
- A parent navigating confusing benefits systems just to keep the lights on

At Hope Atlanta, we're seeing:

- A rise in working families experiencing homelessness
- People displaced by scams, evictions, and skyrocketing rents
- Individuals managing trauma, distrust, and untreated chronic conditions

We embed mental health professionals into our outreach teams. We guide people toward services when they're ready. And we build relationships rooted in dignity and trust.

## CLIENT STORY

# From a Truck to a 10-Year Contract



Meet Bradley: Electrician, Husband, and Business Owner

Bradley and his wife never thought they'd be homeless. But after falling victim to a rental scam, they were labeled squatters—forced out with nowhere to go.

For two years, they lived in their truck.

She waited in the passenger seat while Bradley worked 10–12-hour shifts. On weekends, they checked into a motel for brief relief.

Eventually, they found a shelter. Then Hope Atlanta. That's when things changed.

We helped Bradley find an apartment. He committed to maintaining employment—and thrived. He's now earning \$35/hour working on a 10-year project. He's also launched a moving business and does electrical work on the side.

"I am doing well. I am happy. And I feel good about myself and life," Bradley shared. "Hope Atlanta was the bridge that helped us go from surviving to thriving."



## SUMMER FOOD DRIVE

# Help Pack the Pantry!

This summer, heat and hunger collide—and the need is rising.

That's why we launched Pack the Pantry. These snack kits aren't just food. They're a gateway.

Our outreach teams use them to:

- Build trust
- Start conversations
- Offer immediate relief
- Connect people to services

You can help:



Host a packing party at your workplace or congregation



Drop off items from our list



Donate to support outreach efforts

**LEARN HOW TO  
PACK THE PANTRY**



Hope Atlanta turns 125 years old this year, and we are not just reflecting on a legacy—we're rewriting the future.

Together, we can reverse the rise in family homelessness and ensure every child, every parent, and every neighborhood has what it needs to thrive.

Let's build a city where no one gets left behind—and where hope isn't just a promise. It's a *plan.*

[www.hopeatlanta.org](http://www.hopeatlanta.org)