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# Best Practices in Veteran Rural Outreach Engagement THN Conference 2023



# What is considered rural?

Rural homelessness can be defined in the context of HUD's definition of homelessness, with the aspect of population size in a given populated area without specific quantification, as long as there is a lack of resources, funding, and basic standards of living as provided in well-defined urban areas. (Yousey & Samudra, 2018)



# Texas Continuums of Care

## Texas Homeless Veterans Data

- Number of homeless Veterans in Texas:  
1,711

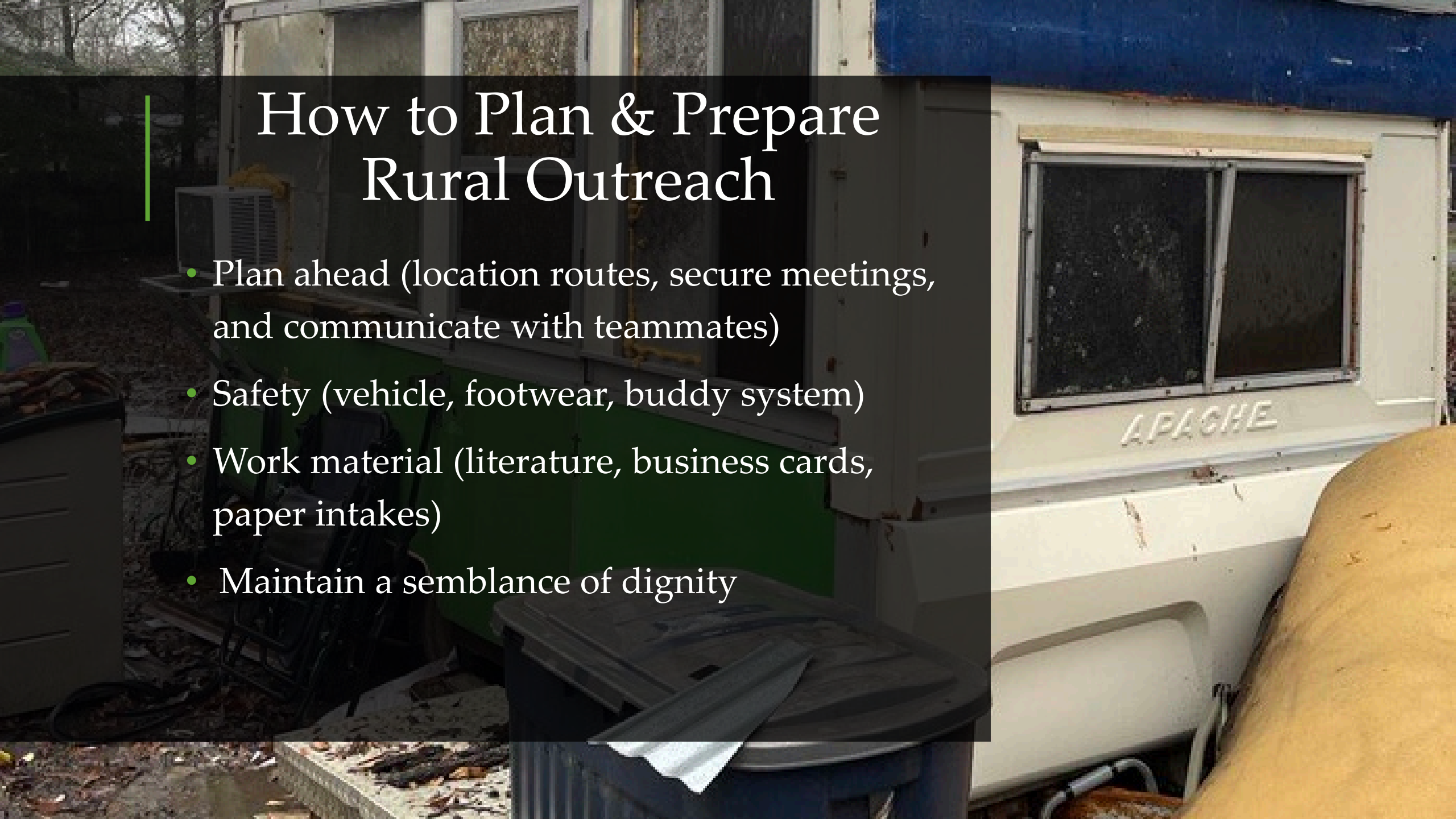
(2022 Annual Homelessness Assessment Report to Congress)

- Number of homeless Veterans in Texas' Balance of state: 584

(2023 Texas Balance of State PIT Count Report)

Map Key





# How to Plan & Prepare Rural Outreach

- Plan ahead (location routes, secure meetings, and communicate with teammates)
- Safety (vehicle, footwear, buddy system)
- Work material (literature, business cards, paper intakes)
- Maintain a semblance of dignity

“Not in plain sight”:

Experiences  
Conducting  
Outreach

- Encampments
- Substandard housing
- Abandoned buildings
- Local businesses
- State/federal parks
- Government – sanctioned encampments
- Motel/hotels paid for by organization



# “Advocacy not Activism”: Community Engagement

- Resource fairs
- Local leaders
- Landlords
- Community events (4<sup>th</sup> of July, Veteran’s Day, Memorial Day)
- Faith-based events (food pantries, social meal gatherings)
- Veterans Stand Down (if your community doesn’t have one, create one!)



# Traditional Resources

- HUD/VASH Staff (routine case staffing aka “by-name list”)
- Veteran Service Officers (VSO’s)
- Texas Veteran Commission (TVC) Reps
- MVPN (Military Veteran Peer Network)
- VLB (Veteran Land Board)
- VFW & American Legions
- Council of Governments
- Food Banks/food pantries
- Congressional District Offices
- Nonprofits that focus on indigent care
- Local Homeless Coalitions (if you don’t have one, start one!)



# Non-traditional Resources

- Private funded non-profits (not linked to the CoC, encourage them!)
- Faith-based organizations
- Unconventional outreach locations
- Civil employees (admin. staff, parks & rec, bus stop staff, library staff, landlords & law enforcement too!)
- Grocery stores
- Good Samaritan from community





A person is sitting on a concrete ledge at night, looking out at a city skyline. The person is wearing a dark jacket and a green hooded sweatshirt. The city lights are visible in the background, and the scene is dimly lit with a blueish tint. A vertical green line is on the left side of the slide.

# Housing First Model

- Learn the general principles of the Housing first Model
- Reach out to private landlords you won't find on conventional rental websites (drive around/canvass)



# Impact of medical & mental health

- Health outcomes for rural Americans lag behind urban areas.
- 20% of the population is reported to live in rural areas.
- Healthcare provider supply disparity in rural areas creates higher natural mortality rates.
- Rural residents live on average one hour further from the nearest medical provider than their urban counterparts.
- Emergency services often take longer to get to (or even locate) rural households.





# Some methods for best assisting criminally challenged veterans

- Felons (crimes against people or property)
- Sex offenders (inability to gain a voucher, proximity to places where children gather)
- Repeat DWI offenders (lack of transportation, valid identification)
- How to prepare them to present themselves (motivational interviewing, honesty, advocacy)







# Drug & alcohol abuse: "Know your community's "poison"

- Rural communities differentiate in drug usage throughout Texas
- Recognize the signs
- Alcohol abuse
- Marijuana use and extreme responses from law enforcement vary in different rural areas
- Familiarize yourself with the fentanyl crisis
- Budget in their spending on substances





## Recognizing Unmet needs

- Emergency Shelters
- Employment opportunities
- Affordable Housing
- Access to specialized medical/mental health care needs
- Transportation
- Permanent Supportive Housing
- Transitional Housing
- Community “buy in”
- Local homeless coalition kinks



# Thank you!!!

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