



NEWS RELEASE

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Highland Rivers Behavioral Health awarded \$750,000 VA grant for veteran suicide prevention in Cherokee and Pickens counties

CANTON, Georgia – September 28, 2022 – Highland Rivers Behavioral Health has been awarded a \$750,000 grant to enhance suicide prevention efforts among veterans and their families in Cherokee and Pickens counties. Awarded by the Veterans Administration (VA), the Staff Sergeant Parker Gordon Fox Suicide Prevention Grant Program (SSG Fox SPGP) is renewable at that amount for three years.

“We know that suicide prevention is a community effort, a community priority, and the VA recognized that the strong local partnerships we have – such as with the Cherokee County Homeless Veterans Program – will not only allow us to be highly effective but also reach some of the most at-risk veterans in our community,” said Melanie Dallas, CEO of Highland Rivers Behavioral Health. “We simply could not stand by and let veterans in our community continue to die by suicide because they don’t have the resources and help they need.”

Highland Rivers Behavioral Health, along with partner organizations of the Cherokee Veterans Mental Health Coalition – Cherokee County Homeless Veterans Program, Marietta Vet Center, and Center for the Advancement of Military and Emergency Services Research at Kennesaw State University – are creating a cohesive and rapid response to veterans in crisis across Cherokee and Pickens counties.

Through the SSG Fox SPGP grant, the coalition will focus on developing an integrated set of supports for veterans at risk of suicide by creating a multidisciplinary rapid response team that focuses on their behavioral health, housing, employment and other needs. This includes providing immediate community-based crisis support and transitioning veterans to lower levels of care as appropriate once their acute crisis needs are met. Referrals for rapid response can come from community partners and service providers, veteran and military organizations, family members, law enforcement, self-referral or emergency departments. The grant also provides funding for education and outreach activities, supportive services and wellness events.

“We have been working with Dr. Matthew Miller, head of the VA suicide prevention program, for the past year looking to address how the more than 100,000 north Georgia veterans can get access to mental health and suicide prevention programs,” said Jim Lindenmayer, director of the Cherokee County Homeless Veteran Program. “The Sgt. Fox Grant is a team approach with targeted clinical capability and veteran community support that we hope will be able to better serve the veteran members of our community and neighborhoods.”

The need for community-based mental health services and resources in Georgia has received increasing support from the Georgia General Assembly, which earlier this year passed two key mental health bills – one focused on community co-response programs and another mandating insurance parity for mental health services in the state; the latter passed both chambers unanimously. Appropriations from the General Assembly to the Georgia Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities also provided more than \$164,000 for services at Highland Rivers to veterans who were uninsured or underinsured during the 2022 fiscal year (July 1, 2021 – June 30, 2022).

“This is a game-changer for the north metro area,” said Georgia Senator Kay Kirkpatrick, MD, who serves on both the Senate Health and Human Services Committee, and the Veterans, Military and Homeland Security Committee, and whose districts includes portions of Cherokee County. “Because of the commitment and leadership of the individuals involved in this effort, I have no doubt that there will be measurable success in the near future.”

Highland Rivers Behavioral Health is one of only two agencies in Georgia to receive a grant from the SSG Fox grant program; the other is the Georgia Department of Veterans Services, which will coordinate with Highland Rivers to develop best practices for community-based veteran suicide prevention that can be implemented throughout the state.

“We look forward to partnering with Highland Rivers to reduce veteran suicides in Cherokee and Pickens counties, and across Georgia,” said Trish Ross, commissioner of the Georgia Department of Veterans Services. “One suicide is too many and it takes all of us working together to help our veterans receive the care and support they need and have earned through service to our nation.”

About Highland Rivers Behavioral Health

Highland Rivers Behavioral Health is one of Georgia’s largest public safety-net behavioral health agencies, providing comprehensive treatment, support and recovery services for adults, children, families and veterans affected by mental health disorders, substance use disorders, and intellectual developmental disabilities. With an integrated continuum of services that includes crisis stabilization, outpatient, residential, community-based services and more, Highland Rivers Behavioral Health operates more than two-dozen treatment facilities across a 13-county, 4,700-square mile area of Northwest Georgia that includes Bartow, Cherokee, Cobb, Fannin, Floyd, Gilmer, Gordon, Haralson, Murray, Paulding, Pickens, Polk and Whitfield counties, and serves approximately 20,000 individuals annually. Highland Rivers Behavioral Health is accredited by the Commission on Accreditation of

Rehabilitation Facilities (CARF) International and is a Tier 1 safety-net Core Provider for the Georgia Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities. For more information, visit <http://highlandrivers.org>.

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