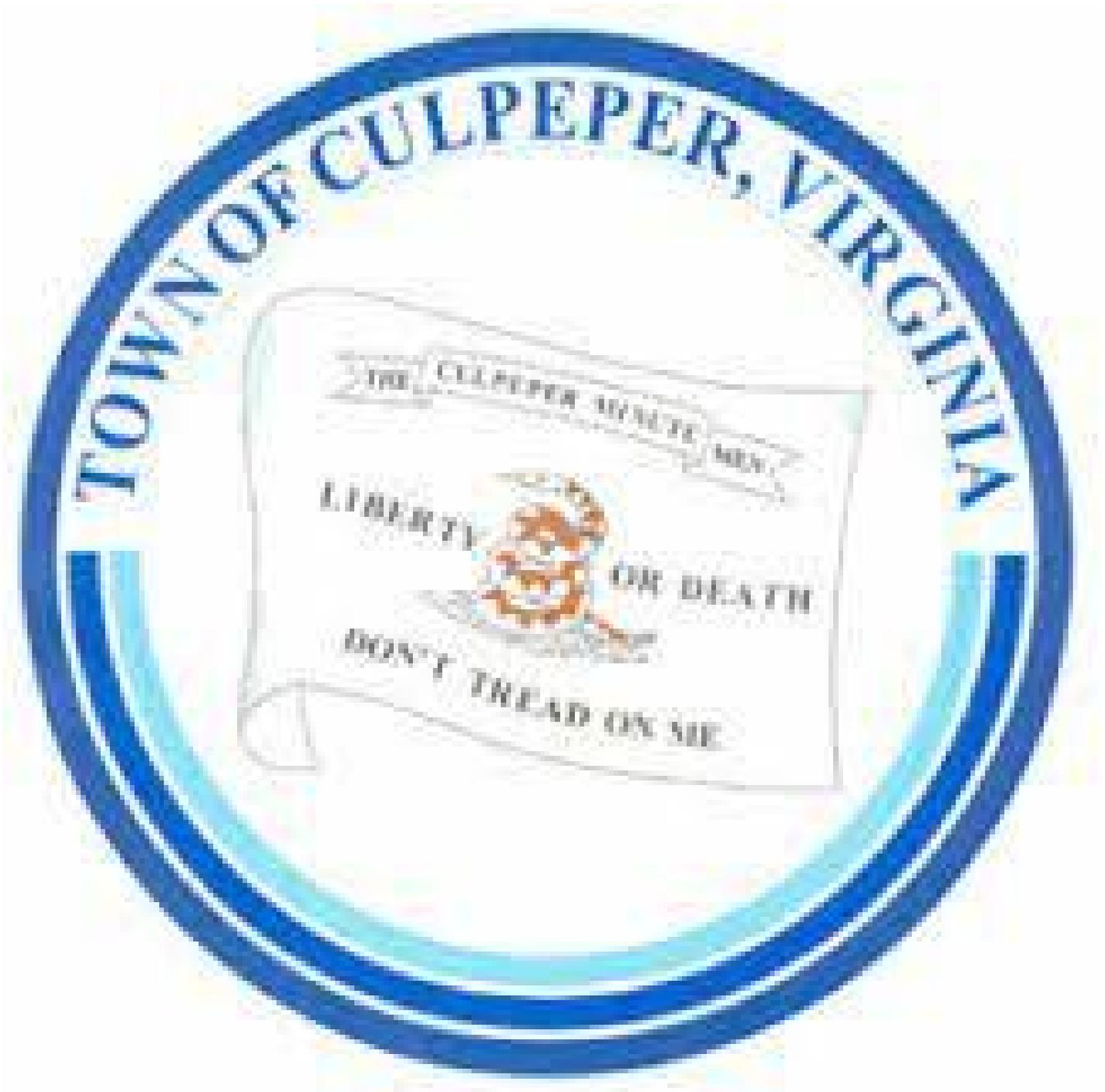


https://www.insidenova.com/culpeper/we-have-a-homelessness-issue-in-culpeper-culpeper-government-agencies-earmark-resources-to-confront-homelessness/article_f2c4ae64-380a-11ec-bcd9-1f334488370a.html

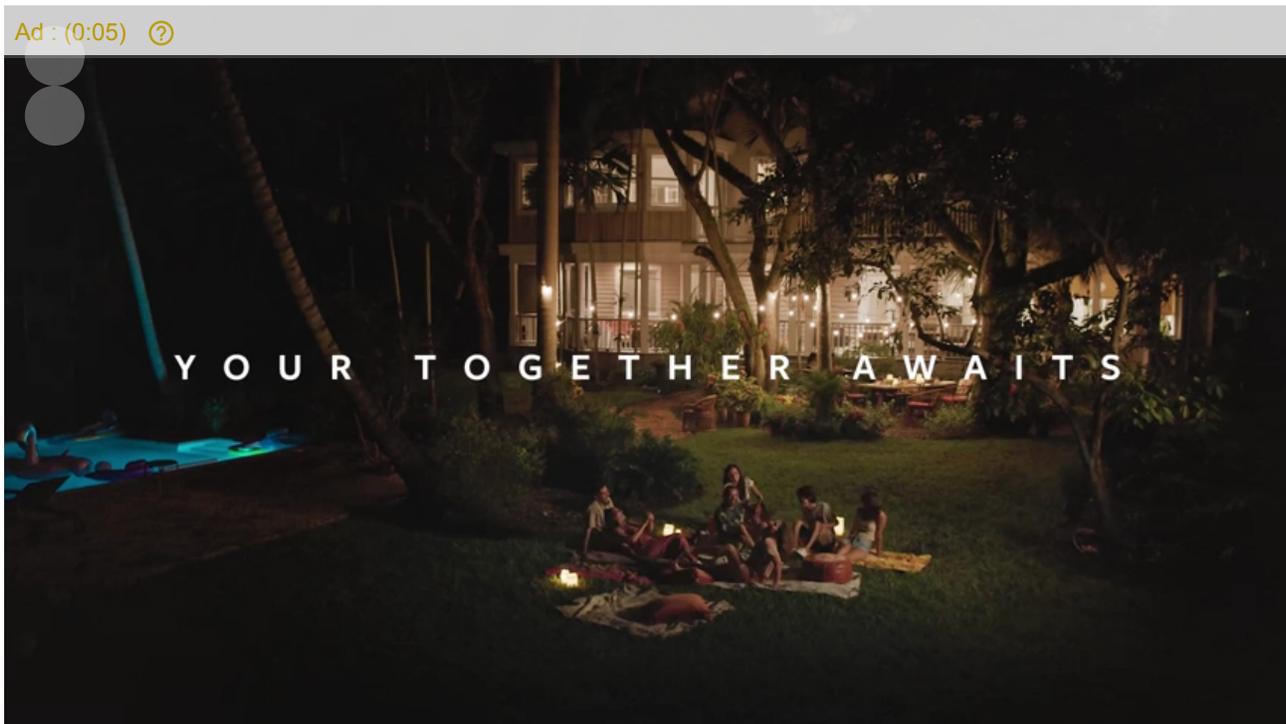
"We have a homelessness issue in Culpeper." Culpeper government, agencies earmark resources to confront homelessness quandary

Maria Basileo | Culpeper Times
Oct 28, 2021



Efforts to fight homelessness in Culpeper continue to rage as police, nonprofits and local governments execute their power and resources to aid those experiencing housing instability.

Trending on InsideNoVa



Powered By 

POLICE

Town of Culpeper police officers are on the front line with their efforts to aid homeless individuals in Culpeper via direct, personal interactions on a daily basis.

"We have a homelessness issue in Culpeper," said Lt. Brittany Jenkins. "We do seem to be an area that provides more resources than some of the other rural areas like Madison and Orange, and they all have their own resources, but we do seem to be cutting edge when it comes to making sure we take the first jumps to try and help people."

Jenkins, who has worked within the department for 13 years, said she has seen an increase in the number of homeless individuals within the last few years.

Since joining the force earlier this year, Co-responder John Bankas has made contact with 10 people considered to be homeless by providing them with resources and follow up visits, but Jenkins said there may be up to 20. During the winter months, she continued, up to 40 individuals can be seen at the Depot downtown.

Bankas, who serves as a mental health professional within the police department, works with individuals experiencing homelessness in the most direct way by engaging them in conversation about the potential services they need to enter into more permanent housing or other aid.

One of the biggest challenges is collaboration with other agencies.

"Have we been successful? No," Bankas said. "Are we going to be successful? I don't know."

"If you support their needs even a little bit, it's better off than we were," Jenkins said. "As long as they know someone out there is advocating for them and wanting to support them and wanting to point them in the right direction, then at least they know that it's there."

He not only provides them with literature and numbers to agencies, Bankas builds rapport and executes follow-up visits.

Both Jenkins and Bankas agree there are people who do not want help and choose to be homeless, but there are others who want to use available resources — be they permanent or temporary.

Bankas recalled meeting a man outside of a convenience store while riding along with an officer. After speaking with him, Bankas asked how he could help. Since the man was only passing through, he asked help finding a temporary job and housing.

Another challenge comes from the public who call police in the hopes they can remove the homeless individual by arresting them.

"This is somebody's family member that you're saying, 'Just throw them away. Throw them in jail or some institution where you forget about them,'" Jenkins said. "They're people, just like me and you. Who, one if they are choosing to live that life, let them live that life. If they're not bothering anybody or they're not harming anybody, let them be."

NONPROFITS

Currently, there are 73 individuals who are "emergency sheltered" in Culpeper hotels and nine individuals in the Culpeper Housing & Shelter Services (CHASS) shelter, according to Foothills Housing Network Coordinator with Rappahannock-Rapidan Regional Commission Rebecca Wareham.

Others are sheltered by the Department of Social Services and Rappahannock Rapidan Community Services or are unsheltered.

"Even when we have the best numbers that we can have, it's not always accurate because we don't know the unsheltered, the actual unsheltered amount currently," Wareham said.

Foothills Housing Network is a partnership of organizations within Culpeper, Madison, Orange, Fauquier and Rappahannock who in some way assist the homeless population or at risk of homeless population by way of grant opportunities and more.

According to the United States Interagency Council on Homelessness, as of January 2020, Virginia had an estimated 5,957 experiencing homelessness on any given day.

Populations of homeless individuals ages 18 to 24 and over 62, Wareham said, have increased the most locally.

Those who are younger, Wareham continued, may be entering homelessness due to aging out of services. Those who are older, she continued, are on lower, fixed incomes who cannot afford housing.

"I think we tend to see because there's more services available in Culpeper that the number of homeless individuals or individuals seeking services tends to be higher from Culpeper compared to certainly the more rural counties like Rappahannock or Madison or even Orange to a certain extent," said Rappahannock-Rapidan Regional Commission Executive Director Patrick Mauney.

GOVERNMENT

According to Culpeper Town Councilwoman Jamie Clancey, the council is currently overhauling zoning ordinances in the hopes they will be more conducive to housing arrangements such as garage apartments.

Wareham said one housing that has worked in other communities are roommates under individual leases, so if one tenant violates the lease, the property won't have to end the lease of everyone who lives there.

"Personally, as a social worker, I recognize the need to create and support programs that improve resilience for families because that saves money in the long run, focusing on upstream initiatives so we're spending less on downstream crisis management," Clancey said.

"Social services or programs that assist the homeless are handled by the county and are not regular functions of the town's core services," said Culpeper Town Councilman Pranas Rimeikis. "Not that we aren't concerned about the issue."

Council members have had some informal discussions about the homeless situation at the committee level, Rimeikis said, and have been briefed on what's being done at the county level and regionally.

"It wouldn't make sense to duplicate services at the town level when town residents already pay taxes to the county to provide those services," Rimeikis continued.

"The board of supervisors supports the fight against homelessness consistently through its funding of Culpeper Human Services which provides significant services and a number of options in trying to address this issue," said Culpeper County Board of Supervisors Chairman Gary Deal.

In terms of the future, Rimeikis continued, Culpeper County is looking at a possible project to build temporary housing on property it owns. The project would require water and sewer connections and additional street access of which the town can provide.

The project, Deal said, would be a partnership effort to include tax credits and local government grants in the form of donated property.

"This is still at a conceptual stage but has great potential," Deal said.

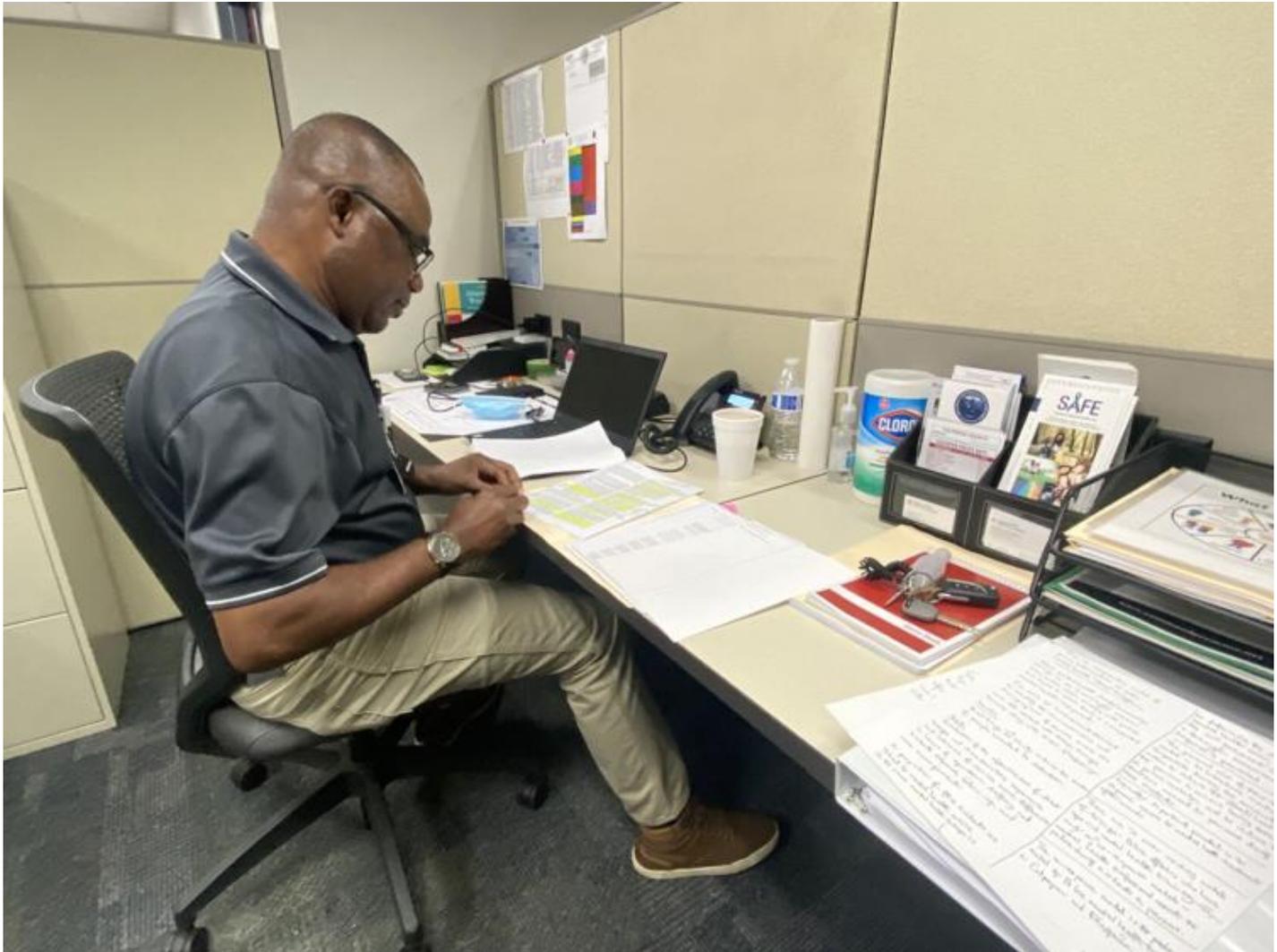
Over the last year and a half, he continued, the board has allocated over \$198,000 for various programs from its federal CARES Act funding to address homelessness during the pandemic.

maria@culpepertimes.com

https://www.insidenova.com/we-need-a-lot-more-johns-culpeper-police-department-praise-co-responder-program/article_cc8d5c80-16f6-11ec-b735-3b3de65e5417.html

“We need a lot more Johns” Culpeper Police Department praise co-responder program

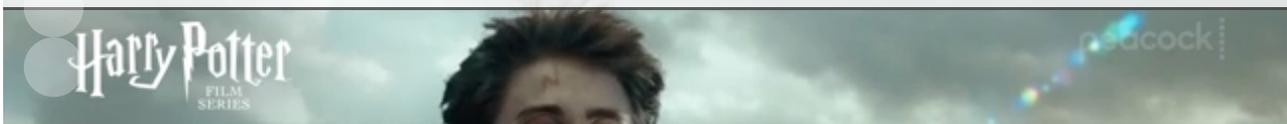
Maria Basileo | Culpeper Times
Sep 16, 2021



John Bankas knows how to connect with the community — be it police officers or members of the public in crisis.

Trending on InsideNoVa

Ad : (0:11) ⓘ



Powered By 

In April, Bankas, a mental health clinician, became embedded with the Culpeper Police Department as a co-responder to de-escalate scenes with clients in crisis and provide resources for further help.

"What John's able to do, from our perspective, is our officers can take these folks in need of services and refer them to John, so now John can follow up with them," said Police Chief Chris Jenkins. "(He can) dig down in and find out, what are the issues? Are they not on their medications? Are they a veteran? What services are they entitled to? How to get them back on their feet, so they're not a chronic user of our services and get them back to being functional in our community again."

Following the denial of a grant application to fund a similar 18-month pilot program in 2018 due to the lack of reliable future funding, the department reached out to local resources to see if they would be willing to help form their own program.

"When the idea of implementing the co-responder program began, we were able to restructure internally and free up a single position to offer to the program," said Rappahannock Rapidan Community Services Executive Director Jim LaGraffe.

While technically an employee of RRCS, Bankas is funded to work with the department for two years.

When researching how to get the program started, Deputy Chief of Police Major Chris Settle called departments from Kansas to Rhode Island to gain some insight into their operations including keeping Bankas visible within the building.

Instead of placing his office near Jenkin's, they opted to place him in the middle of the patrol officers desks so the two groups could commingle and work as partners in triage while in the field.

On Bankas's first day, he was supposed to be simply observing while riding along on patrol. However, when a call came in about a Vietnam War veteran barricaded inside his trailer making gun threats, Bankas was asked to help.

After some talking, the man eventually came out of his trailer and asked to be taken to the hospital.

Settle said he knew the call would not have ended up that way had Bankas not been there. Officers would have potentially had to make a forced entry and used force.

In response to Bankas's work on the scene, a 30-year veteran of the force emailed Settle to express his immense pleasure in the way the scene was handled and how it convinced him the program could work.

Settle knew the program would work, he said, he just had to convince the other officers.

Settle explained the tight-knit culture within law enforcement worried him because he wasn't sure if the other officers would accept Bankas.

"One of the concerns that I had was cops are leery until they build trust," Jenkins said. "You bring in somebody from another agency - a non-law enforcement agency - inside your building, but I will say, our whole department accepted John immediately."

The officers see Bankas as "another tool in their tool belt," Settle said. And said he has even heard colleagues refer to him as "The Bankas."

Bankas, who formerly worked as an outpatient therapist, gets cases three different ways - while on patrol with an officer, a referral from an officer or assigned a case from a lieutenant.

The department responds to about 70 crisis calls per month, Bankas said.

Jenkins explained the co-responder cuts down on use of services via the jail, state hospitals and magistrate.

"We know that law enforcement spends too many resources responding to individuals in our community needing behavioral health support," LaGraffe said. "Unfortunately, many of these individuals are unknown to us as they have never sought help previously. As our clinicians are able to meet people where they are, we are able to get them to the right help at the right time."

Settle said Bankas's work has been invaluable in reducing the department's use of force, freeing up officers to return to law enforcement and providing long-term solutions to issues arising from crisis calls.

Although the officers receive mental health training, Settle said, they are not trained clinicians. Officers trained to arrest those who have broken the law, but find themselves without many resources beyond literature when encountering a person in crisis that has not broken the law.

When responding to calls, Bankas doesn't dress like an officer, but instead in khakis and a RRCS shirt.

Bankas also spends time everyday following up with clients who have been given resources following encounters with the police.

"Navigating what services are out here is very difficult," Jenkins said. It's probably one of the hardest things."

Settle wishes the department could have seven or eight co-responders so they can have someone on staff at all times.

RRCS approached the Culpeper Wellness Foundation, The Northern Piedmont Community Foundation and the Path Foundation for support for a second position, which they have all supported. They are currently beginning the recruitment process for that position and will bring that person on as soon as possible.

The leadership that Chief Jenkins and his team display in understanding and wanting to assist our community members in crisis has been admirable," LaGraffe said. "We are so happy that we have been able to implement this program in Culpeper. I am especially thrilled that in the very short time it has been running we have seen a positive outcome."

maria@culpepertimes.com

https://www.insidenova.com/culpeper/video-it-definitely-restored-some-of-my-faith-in-the-next-generation/article_e6ffa6ea-2cf4-11ec-898c-776bc0be615d.html

VIDEO: "It definitely restored some of my faith in the next generation."

Maria Basileo | Culpeper Times
Oct 14, 2021



Sam Pories, 18, left, stands next to Rese Frederick, 17, as he holds 9-month-old Beckett Thompson in El Jaripeo on Oct. 3 as Beckett's mom, Karah Thompson holds her daughter Bryleigh, 4.

MARIA BASILEO | CULPEPER TIMES

Car accidents shock drivers to their core by their mere suddenness, but when Karah Thompson's 9-month-old son, Beckett, failed to cry after the impact, she began to panic.

Trending on InsideNoVa

Ad : (0:20)

Powered By 

"It was devastating because he wasn't crying. He wasn't doing anything," she said. "I was shaking so bad while trying to get him unbuckled."

Thompson was hit at the intersection of Blue Ridge Avenue and Sperryville Pike while en route to pick up her daughter Bryleigh, 4, at church on Sept. 20. The crash broke the axle and wheel off on her van, making it impossible to put the car in park and open the backdoors to get Beckett out.

"My heart was in my feet because it hit on his side and him not crying, it is something I don't ever want to experience not being able to get to my kid," she said.

Thompson remembered two or three boys with long hair there to grab Beckett and take care of him on the sidewalk as she assessed the damage and talked to police.

"They had no idea what was really going on," Thompson said. "They just took the baby and kept him safe on the sidewalk."

"I just couldn't be more thankful that they were there (to) grab him."

Rese Frederick, 17, Matty Mitchell, 17, and Sam Pories, 18, were skateboarding nearby at Yowell Skate Park when they heard the collision and ran over to help.

"We heard the smash and then I heard the car like screeching," Frederick said. "I just ran out there to see what happened."

"We all just decided to go there and help and see what we could do," he continued. "I knew it would be worth helping."

Mitchell, Frederick said, tried to open the door.

"They manhandled the door like the car was on fire to get my kid out, and I could not be more thankful," Thompson said.

Once the door opened a few inches - enough for Beckett to slide through - another man inside the car unbuckled him and handed him to Frederick.

Pories, who is nearing completion of his Eagle Scout test, took a short video of Frederick holding Beckett after the crash.

"As you go through those ranks (in Boy Scouts), you're taught how to deal with all situations, so I was trained on what to do in a way," Pories said.

Following the accident, Thompson posted on social media about the boys' generosity.

"If your son was at Yowell skate park this evening and came up after the accident that happened," she wrote, "please let them know they have helped restore some faith in their generation."

Frederick's father, Billy, became aware of the post and began messaging Thompson on social media, resulting in plans to get the group together.

"(I wanted) to at least see them again because it was like a blur," Thompson said.

Rese and Billy Frederick as well as Pories met with Thompson and her two children at El Jariego in Culpeper on Sept. 26 to reflect on the crash.

Mitchell was unable to attend.

"I was proud obviously," Billy Frederick said. "We raised our kids to help out when they should."

"Sometimes I hate being from a small town and then other times it's heartwarming to know that people are always there to help even if you don't think that they are," Thompson said.

maria@culpepertimes.com

NASDAQ reserves "PJ" as ticker for Jet Token Inc.

Reg A+ via StartEngine Primary, LLC, member FINRA/SIPC. Speculative, illiquid, & high risk, investment, total loss possible. Read the Offering Circular and Risks first. Jet Token has not tak...

Jet Token | Sponsored

[Learn More](#)

Pay No Interest For Over a Year With These Credit Cards

NerdWallet | Sponsored

[Learn More](#)