

Community Heart & Soul®

Name of CHS Project/City, State: Upson County includes Thomaston (the county seat) and Yatesville, as well as other unincorporated areas of the county.

Population: 26,320 (2019)

Challenge: At the beginning of their project, Thomaston-Upson Community Heart & Soul hoped to engage the community while also emphasizing the importance of residents as active contributors to local decision-making. Their inspirational call-to-action for the community was, “This isn’t happening to us, it is happening because of us!”

Focus: Thomaston-Upson Community Heart & Soul centered their work on the Heart & Soul principle, “Involve Everyone.” Reaching out to all demographics in the community was at the forefront of their design for every meeting, training, workshop, and event.

Key Tools: Community Network Analysis to establish networks; creative community engagement activities to bring the community together

Brief Description/Summary of Community:

The first Heart & Soul community in the state of Georgia, Upson County is about 90 minutes southeast of Atlanta. The county seat is Thomaston, which serves as a hub for the area. The Thomaston-Upson County School District serves the entire county.

Georgia EMC provided coaching services on behalf of the local electric cooperative Upson EMC. Both city and county government and local organizations, supported Thomaston-Upson’s Community Heart & Soul initiative. The Project Coordinator retained her office at the County Clerk’s office, which reinforced the collaboration that was essential for this county-wide effort.

Thomaston-Upson Heart & Soul “By the Numbers”:

- 6,770 number of residents connected through Community Heart & Soul
- 2,817 number of data points collected from stories that will directly impact local decision making
- 554 number of responses to the Facebook post, “What type of things do you think our community would benefit from?”
- 758 number of residents who prioritized the 20 action ideas in Phase 3

Volunteer and Community Response:

The Heart & Soul Team focused on creative engagement activities in the community. Each meeting and activity brought new community members and volunteers together to share their stories and thoughts on what matters most to the community. Engagement activities included:

- Story circles connected to annual Emancipation Proclamation Celebration
- Game On Arcade Day to reach youth
- Hopes and Ideas jar at public offices

Community Heart & Soul®

- Large chalkboard to collect ideas at downtown events and festivals

Heart & Soul Outcomes:

- 20 prioritized action ideas, stewarded by the Heart & Soul Legacy Team, IG-Knight Thomaston Upson
- Commendation from state legislature with a resolution designating Thomaston-Upson Community Heart & Soul Day at the state capitol
- Increased volunteerism throughout the community, including the creation of Unsung Hero Awards to lift up contributions of residents
- An increased awareness of civic engagement and the opportunity to play a role in local decision making
- Thomaston Chamber of Commerce recognized the Heart & Soul team with a “Unity in Community” Award (2018)

