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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

***Annual National Homeless Persons' Memorial Day is Saturday, December 21***

**GAINESVILLE, FL (Dec. 16, 2019)** — Saturday, December 21 is National Homeless Persons' Memorial Day. The National Coalition for the Homeless (NCH) has sponsored this day of remembrance since 1990. According to their website, the goal is to "bring attention to the tragedy of homelessness and to remember those who have died while living without a permanent home."

From the 2019 study by the Florida Council on Homelessness, there were 28,591 people statewide living on the streets, in the woods or in emergency shelters at the time of their count, down by nearly 4 percent from 2018. In North Central Florida, the most recent annual Point-In-Time count in January found 804 homeless individuals. This year, five local homeless individuals passed away.

"This memorial day gives us an opportunity to remember those in our community who were not able to secure permanent housing," said Mona Gil de Gibaja, UWNCFL president & CEO. "Raising awareness is just one aspect of our commitment to help permanently house homeless men, women, children and families in North Central Florida.

Since 2018, United Way of North Central Florida (UWNCFL) has been the lead agency for the North Central Florida Alliance for the Homeless and Hungry (Alliance), the local Continuum of Care (CoC). The Alliance is one of United Way's partnership initiatives to help create additional lasting change in our community.

As lead agency we work with our partners to coordinate the annual Point-In-Time (PIT) count. The data collected during the PIT count is used to determine the number of literally homeless we have in our community and the needs they have. This information will also be incorporated into the 2020 Census counts and help us determine where we need additional resources to expand the permanent housing options in our community, explained Gil de Gibaja.

The next Point-In-Time count will take place in Alachua County on January 29, 2020. The Alliance is seeking donations for goodie bags for homeless individuals who complete the survey. For a complete list of requested donation items, please visit [www.ncfalliance.org/pit-donate](http://www.ncfalliance.org/pit-donate)

If you are interested in volunteering for the annual Point-In-Time count, please contact Brenda Chamberlain at [bchamberlain@unitedwayncfl.org](mailto:bchamberlain@unitedwayncfl.org).

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***North Central Florida Alliance for the Homeless and Hungry partners with the community to prevent and end homelessness and hunger, and to increase self-sufficiency for individuals and families by providing leadership, advocacy, support, standards and funding. We serve Alachua, Bradford, Gilchrist, Levy and Putnam counties. In July 2018, United Way of North Central Florida became the Lead Agency for the Alliance.***

***United Way of North Central Florida fights for the health, education and financial stability of every person in our community and has been a staple in North Central Florida since 1957. We serve a six-county area that includes Alachua, Bradford, Dixie, Gilchrist, Levy and Union counties. Since our inception, we have raised nearly \$100 million for the region. Our top priority is to create real social change that leads to better lives and healthier communities for North Central Florida.***

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