

# **Thurston County 2017 Homeless Point-in-time Count Process and Survey Results**



## **May 2017**

Produced by ACR Business Consulting in partnership with  
Thurston County Housing and Community Renewal Department of  
Thurston County Public Health and Social Services



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Photo Credit: Jeff Spring

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## **The Homeless Point-in-time Count: Overview<sup>1</sup>**

The Homeless Point-in-Time (PIT) count is a requirement by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). HUD requires communities to submit a count of the homeless population in their area as well as information on specific sub-populations, including chronically homeless persons, veterans, and unaccompanied youth.

A PIT count is composed of two parts: a *sheltered* PIT count, which is required every year, and an *unsheltered* PIT count, which is required at least every other year. Communities submit this data annually through their Continuum of Care (CoC) applications for Homeless Assistance Grants. The Washington State Homelessness Housing and Assistance Act ([ESSHB 2163 - 2005](#)) requires each county to conduct an annual PIT count of sheltered and unsheltered homeless persons in Washington State in accordance with the requirements of HUD<sup>2</sup>. The count takes place in January each year with the date set by HUD. For 2017, the date of the count was Thursday, January 26.

Many communities, including Thurston County, develop their sheltered count from their Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) data. Thurston County also facilitates in-person surveys to add additional demographic detail beyond just a number. HUD does not prescribe the survey method to use but does provide guidance on survey techniques.

The unsheltered count is more complicated and costly to conduct than the sheltered count, and HUD is stricter about the acceptable methodologies for performing this count. Because unsheltered persons are not generally recorded in HMIS, communities have much more planning to do to account for unsheltered individuals. There are 3 accepted methodologies provided by HUD to conduct an unsheltered count:

1. **Street counts.** Community volunteers visit the streets and locations where they expect to find homeless individuals and count them based on observation over a very specific period (usually between dusk and dawn on a single night). This method is relatively easy to organize, train volunteers to conduct, and carry out. However simple to carry out, this method invariably misses some people, and little information is gained beyond the total number of unsheltered persons.
2. **Street count with an interview.** With this approach, count participants are trained to interview every person they encounter who appears to be unsheltered. The sample-with-interview approach yields a much richer level of data to the community, but tends to be more complicated to de-duplicate.
3. **Service-based count.** The community counts people as they receive homeless services during the specific count period. Service-based counts can extend beyond 1 day, but cannot exceed 7 days after the date of the count. Communities using the service-based approach will often plan a specific event that is likely to attract homeless persons such as a special breakfast or healthcare-related offering. Although this method requires the community to carefully determine who has already been counted, it tends to reach a particular homeless population that chooses to use the supportive services available, including soup kitchens, drop-in centers, and street outreach teams, and who would otherwise be difficult to count because of where they choose to sleep.

To determine the most appropriate methodology to use, communities need to evaluate, among many things, their climate, size, and availability of resources. The number of

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<sup>1</sup> Office of Policy Development and Research (PD&R) U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development: <https://www.huduser.gov/portal/periodicals/em/summer12/highlight2.html>

<sup>2</sup> Washington State Department of Commerce: <http://www.commerce.wa.gov/Programs/housing/Homeless/Pages/Annual-Point-In-Time-Count.aspx>

anticipated participants in the count and the size of the area often drive the method that is chosen. However, several communities use a combination of these methodologies.

In addition to homeless population data, HUD requires communities to submit subpopulation data on chronically homeless individuals and families, veterans, severely mentally ill individuals, chronic substance users, persons with HIV/AIDS, victims of domestic violence, and unaccompanied children (under 18). When the subpopulation data is incomplete, communities use sampling and extrapolation methods to derive their counts.

### **The Homeless Point-in-time Count: iCount Thurston**

For the second consecutive year, Thurston County partnered with ACR Business Consulting to facilitate the PIT Count. With the community awareness and outreach generated by the iCount Thurston brand, ACR Business Consulting employed the same methodology and approach used in 2016.

For the 2017 PIT count in Thurston County, the goals were to: (1) maximize the scope of the one-day count through increased targeted outreach efforts to homeless veterans, youth, and neighbors in rural communities, while ensuring safety for all, (2) replicate data collection processes and minimize duplication to increase confidence in data quality, (3) incorporate the human connection of the PIT count, understanding that this one day is as much about talking to- and connecting with our community's neighbors in need as it is about knowing how many are struggling, and (4) collect some relevant information to inform and educate local community's citizens and policy makers.

#### **Maximize the Scope of the One-day Count**

Facilitation efforts utilized **street counts with an interview** and **service-based counts** to connect with unsheltered neighbors throughout Thurston County. Building off of the success of the Community Connect Event framework used in prior years, iCount Thurston expanded the strategy to plan and facilitate several local events across the county on the day of the count. The county was divided into 7 areas, and partner agencies and community volunteers were identified within each area. In the urban areas of Tumwater, Lacey, and Olympia, roving teams were also utilized to connect with folks who may not have come to the community events. Each event was planned in coordination with a local partner agency during typical hours of operation familiar to those seeking services. The [Interfaith Works Warming Center](#) located in downtown Olympia was the location of the main Connect Event in the urban core, with satellite events taking place at the [Lacey Veterans Services Hub](#) and [CYS' Rosie's Place](#). Homeless neighbors were invited to enjoy free hot coffee, a hot lunch, get a free haircut, bike tune-up, shop for donated clothing, and stock up on snacks and hygiene products. In addition, partner agencies in the communities of Yelm ([Yelm Lions Club](#)), Rainier ([Rainier Emergency Food Center](#)), Tenino ([Tenino Food Bank](#)) and Rochester ([ROOF](#)) all facilitated their own Connect Events with similar services, snacks, and community building. Due to the sensitivity and potential safety concerns, the count did not include going into homeless encampments or wooded areas.

#### **Replicate Data Collection Processes and Minimize Data Duplication to Improve Quality**

To maintain data consistency and quality, the revamped surveys were utilized by iCount Thurston volunteers and most agencies for the 2017 PIT Count. As always, survey data quality relied on participants authorizing the use of their information by way of signature. This allowed duplicate surveys to be identified, and it significantly reduced the likelihood of double entry into HMIS across the unsheltered and sheltered counts. For the second consecutive year, the iCount Thurston team of volunteers did a tremendous job connecting with homeless neighbors

to gather complete surveys. Throughout the County, **308 surveys were collected encompassing 531 individuals.**

#### Incorporate the Human Connection

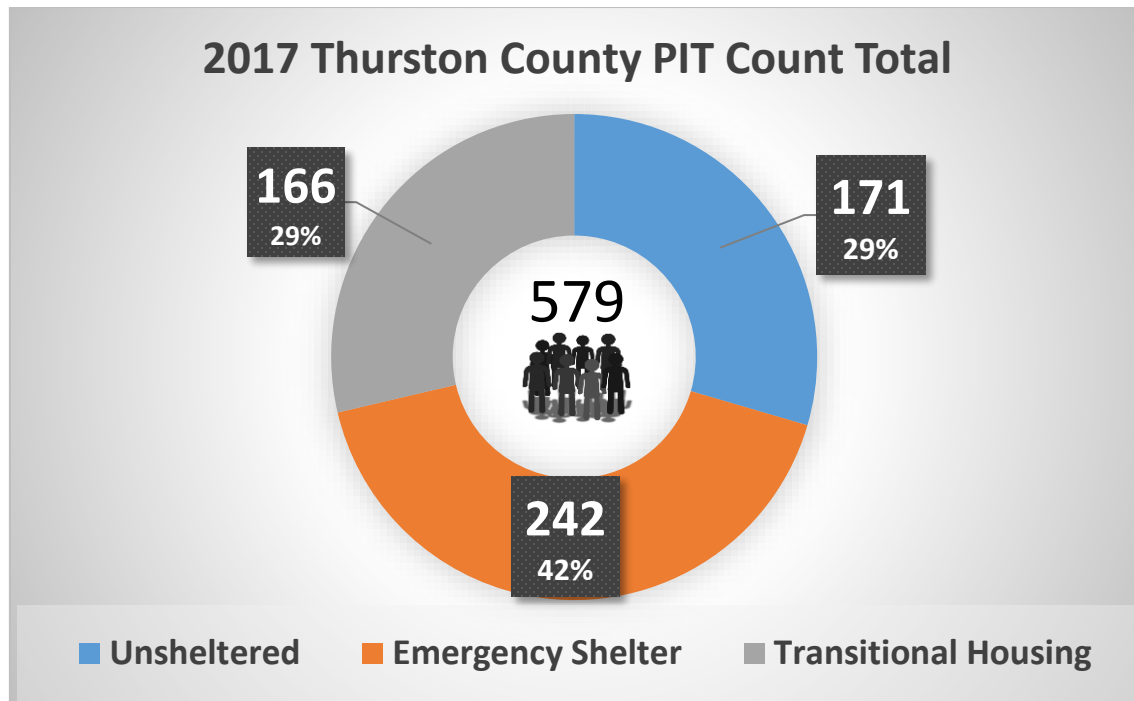
iCount Thurston continued to expand outreach and community involvement across Thurston County. Building on a strong [Facebook presence](#) community members continue to post and share information on issues related to homelessness, which will help in preparing for the count in future years. The team secured individual and business donations of cash and in-kind gifts to cover all of the food, give-away items, and services that were provided to homeless neighbors participating in the census. This included over 300 waterproof “goody-bags” filled with various items identified by the Connect Event teams such as pizza coupons, snacks, instant coffee, socks, toothbrushes and toothpaste. The goody-bags were handed out to struggling neighbors whether they chose to participate in the survey or not, and they created a warm connection point for survey facilitators. For a second straight year, iCount Thurston partnered with the Anonymously Yours Foundation located in Tenino, WA to accept the tax deductible donations and help organize and promote the PIT count. Over 40 individuals and businesses contributed cash and in-kind donations to help the team offer both fun and functional items to our neighbors in need. The focused efforts to create specific events for each community activated a larger segments of neighbors in each city and introduced them to resources that they have available in their own communities.

iCount Thurston recruited over 80 volunteers across the County to assist with pre-census prep, day-of event logistics, and survey facilitation. For the second year, the Olympia Barber School offered free haircuts to survey participants at 3 events in Olympia and Lacey during the PIT Count. And the Census Jam located at the Interfaith Works Warming Center proved to be a great partnership, offering a warm, dry space for over 100 community members to enjoy hot coffee, giveaways, and access services. Local photographers also donated hours of their time to document the sense of community and energy of the day.

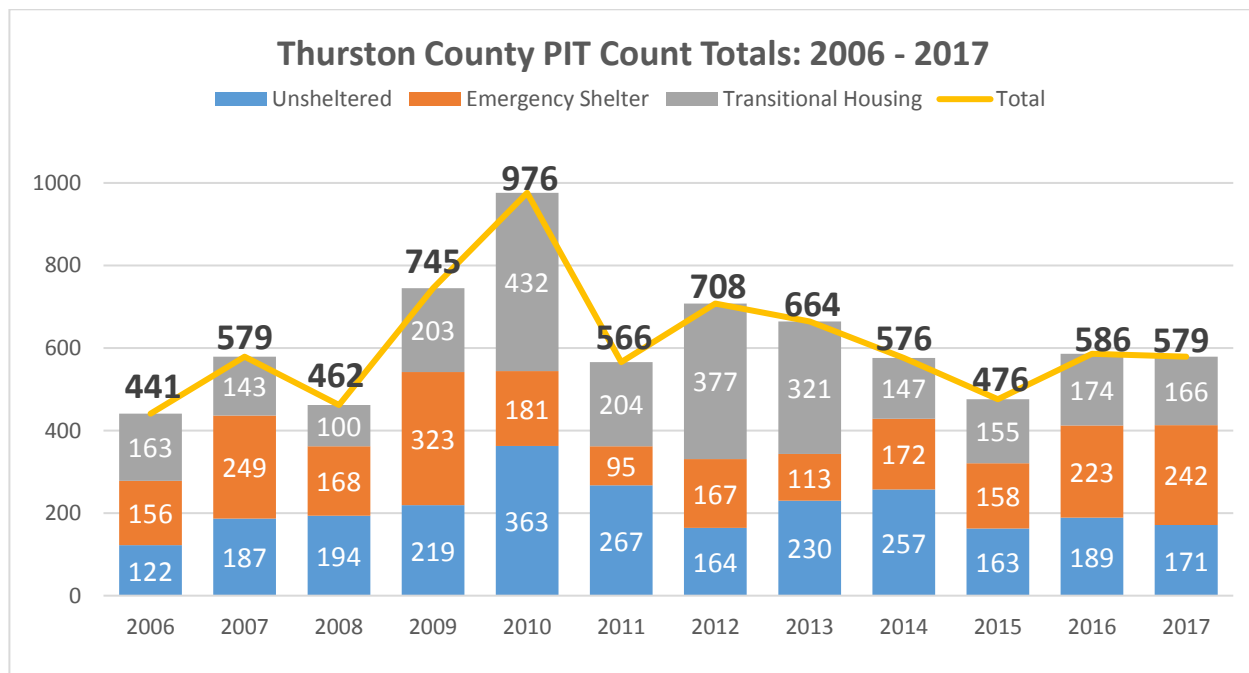
#### Collect Relevant Information to Inform Local Community’s Citizens and Policy Makers

The facilitation of the PIT count is a HUD requirement and takes real time, energy, and resources to be inclusive and impactful. Beyond the federally mandated survey questions there is relevant information that can be collected utilizing the efforts already required to facilitate the PIT Count. Having the Homeless and Affordable Housing Coordinator as the lead provided Thurston County with the ability to look at adding additional questions to the survey that are relevant for the County and local jurisdictions. The topic of housing affordability and access is currently a major focal point in Thurston County. With median home prices continuing to rise and accessibility for low and no income neighbors becoming more difficult, questions were added to the survey this year to gauge efforts by homeless neighbors to secure housing, and to better understand the reality of barriers these households face in finding stability.

## Thurston County 2017 PIT Count Results



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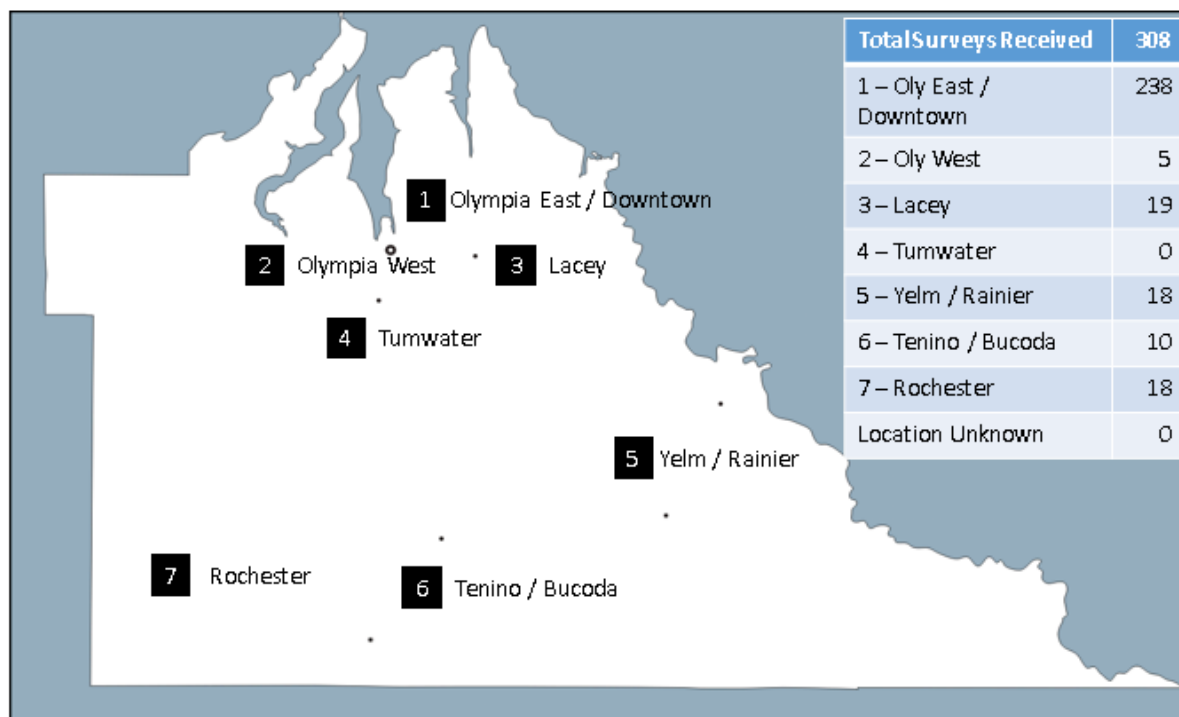
<sup>3</sup> Total PIT Count is the result of the combination of Surveys, HMIS Emergency Shelter and Transitional Housing entries on January 26, 2017. Confirmed by the WA State Department of Commerce.



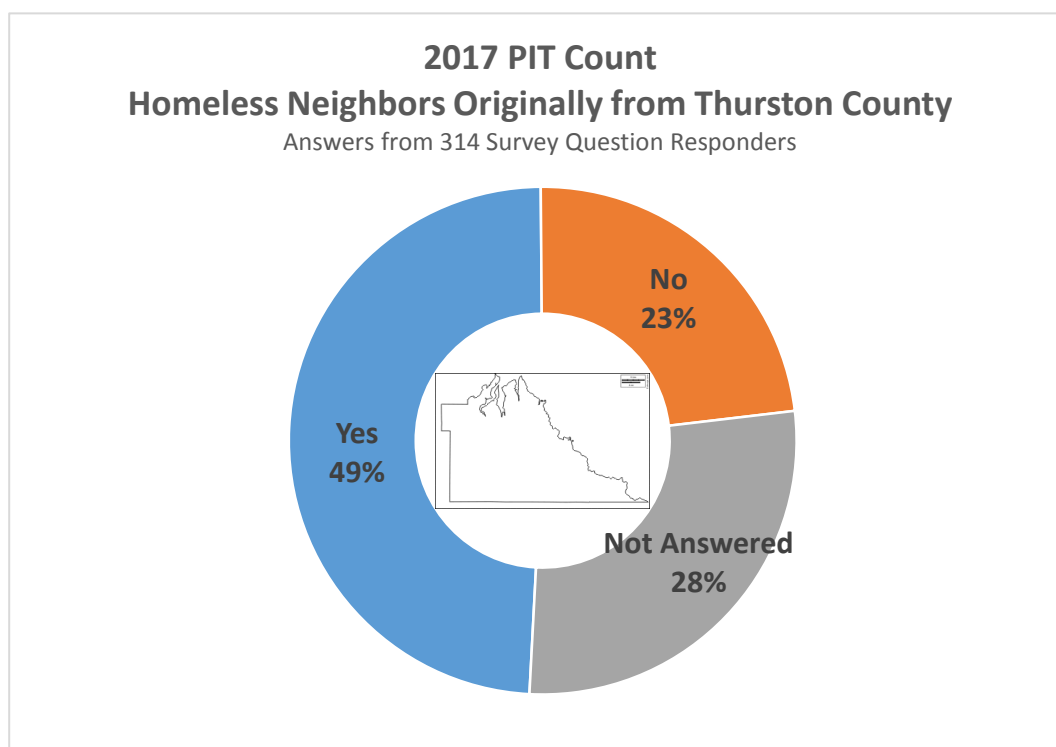
## 2017 PIT Count: Demographic Data from 308 Surveys Collected

The following section provides a look at key results from the surveys collected.

### 2017 PIT Count Survey Map and Counts



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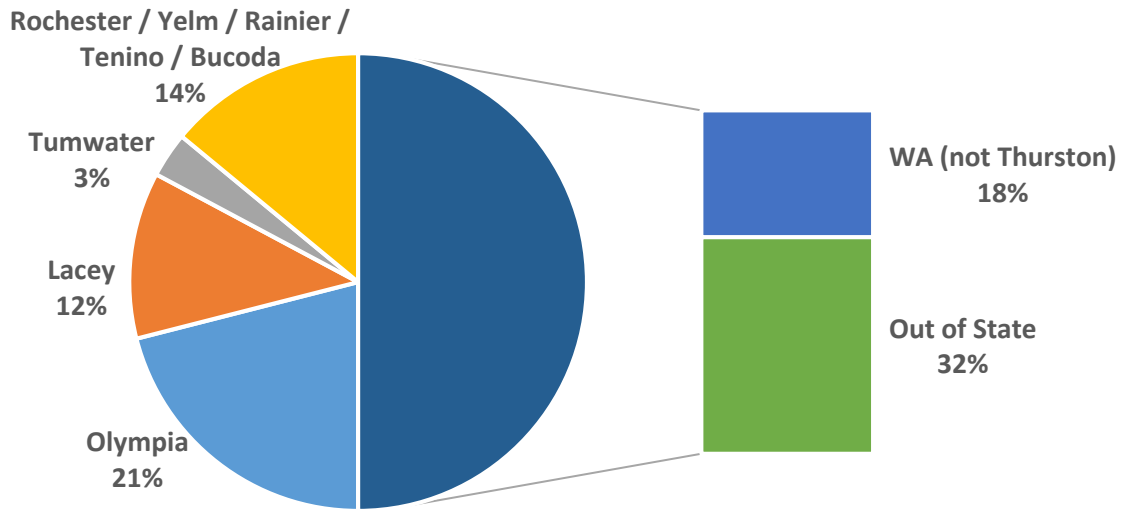
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<sup>4</sup>2017 PIT Count List of Locations and Surveys Collected at each can be found at the end of this report.

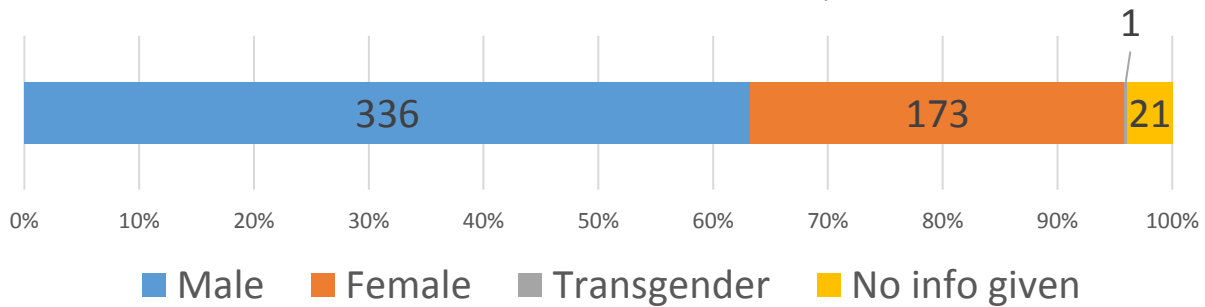
<sup>5</sup> This question was not asked on forms used by Family Support Center and Pear Blossom Place. As a result, 87 out of 314 did not answer this question. Worth noting however is that 76 of the 87 have their last known address in Thurston County.



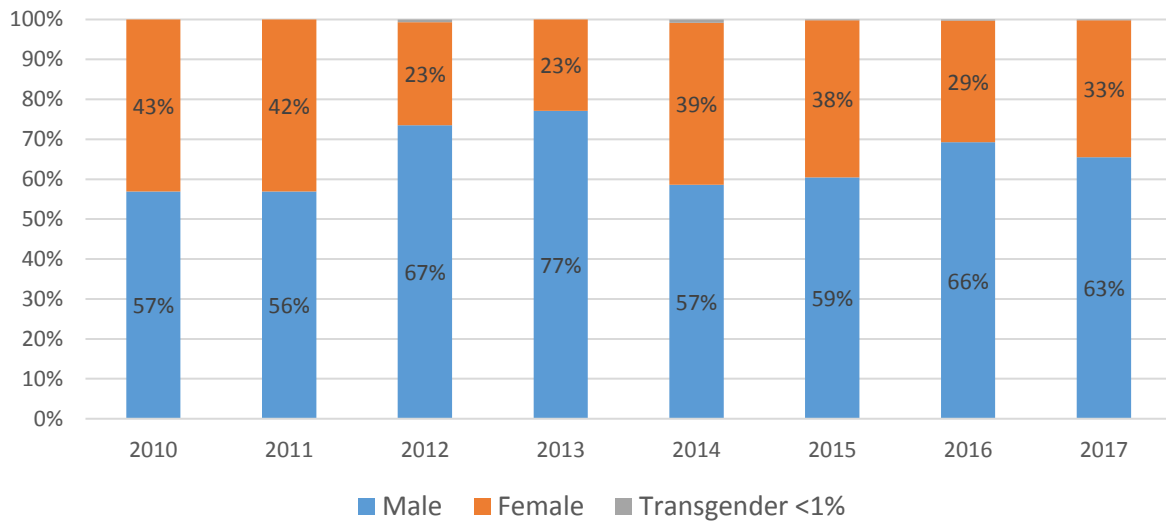
# **2017 PIT Count** **Last Address of Those Currently Homeless in Thurston County** Answers from 314 Survey Question Responders



# **2017 PIT Count** **Gender Classification of Homeless Neighbors** 531 Total Individuals Included in Surveys



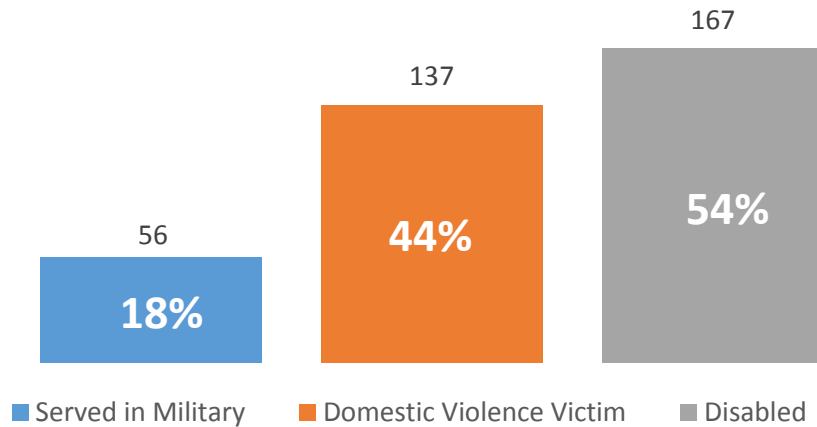
### Gender Classification of Homeless Neighbors by % in Thurston County 2010 - 2017



6

### 2017 PIT Count Homeless Neighbors Citing Veteran Status / Domestic Violence / Disability

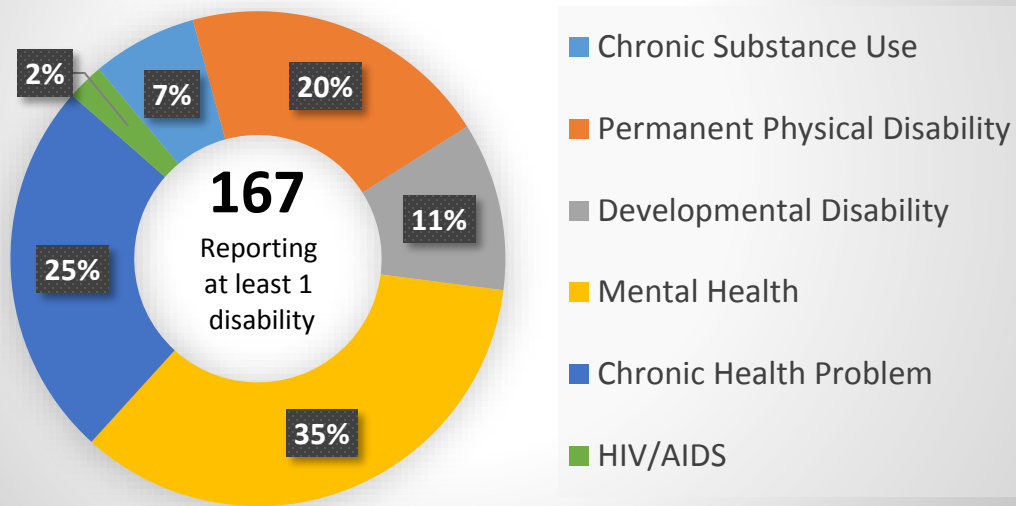
308 Surveys Collected - Based on Head of Household Status



<sup>6</sup> Data collected from Thurston County prior year census reports

## 2017 PIT Count

### A Closer Look at Disabilities Reported by Homeless Neighbors



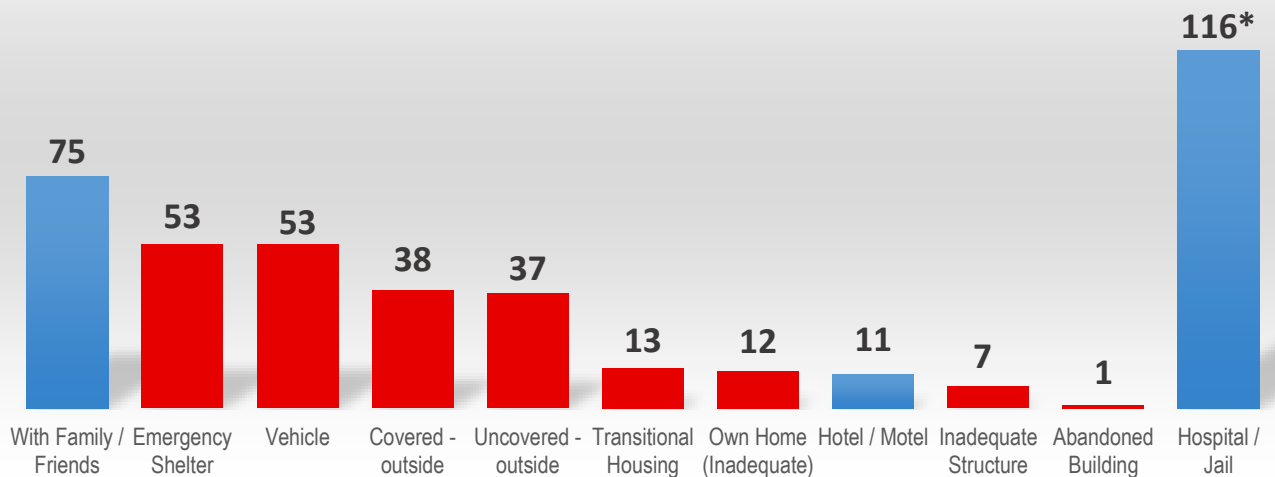
## 2017 PIT Count

### Where Homeless Neighbors Slept the Night Prior to the Count

Answers from 416 Survey Question Responders

Not considered Homeless by HUD definition (202)

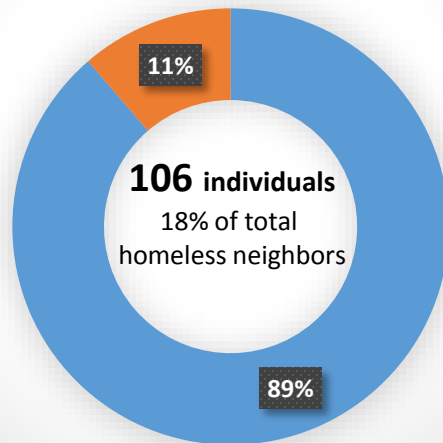
Considered Homeless by HUD definition (214)



\* Data collected from Thurston County Department of Corrections and Providence St. Peters Hospital

## 2017 PIT Count Chronically Homeless Neighbors

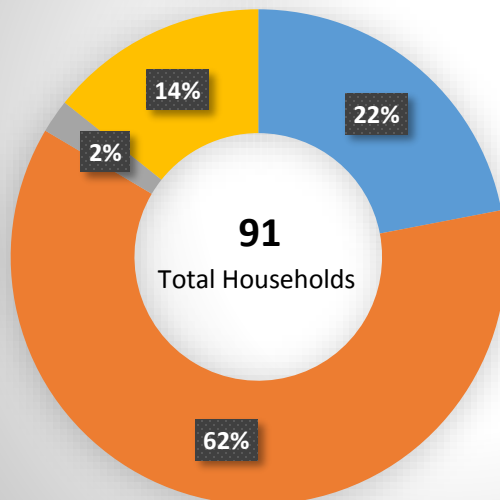
308 Surveys Collected



■ Homeless for > 1 year    ■ At least 4 times in past 3 years

## 2017 PIT Count Chronically Homeless Households

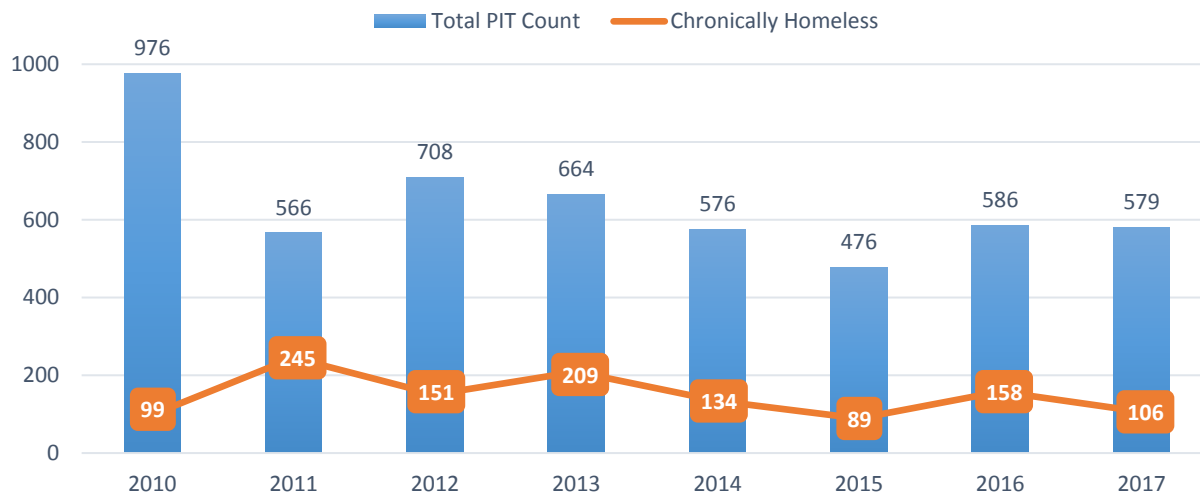
by Sub-Population - 308 Surveys Collected



■ Veteran Single - 20  
■ Non-Veteran Single - 56  
■ Veteran Family - 2  
■ Non-Veteran Family - 13

## Chronically Homeless Neighbors: 2010 - 2017

Surveyed during the annual PIT Count



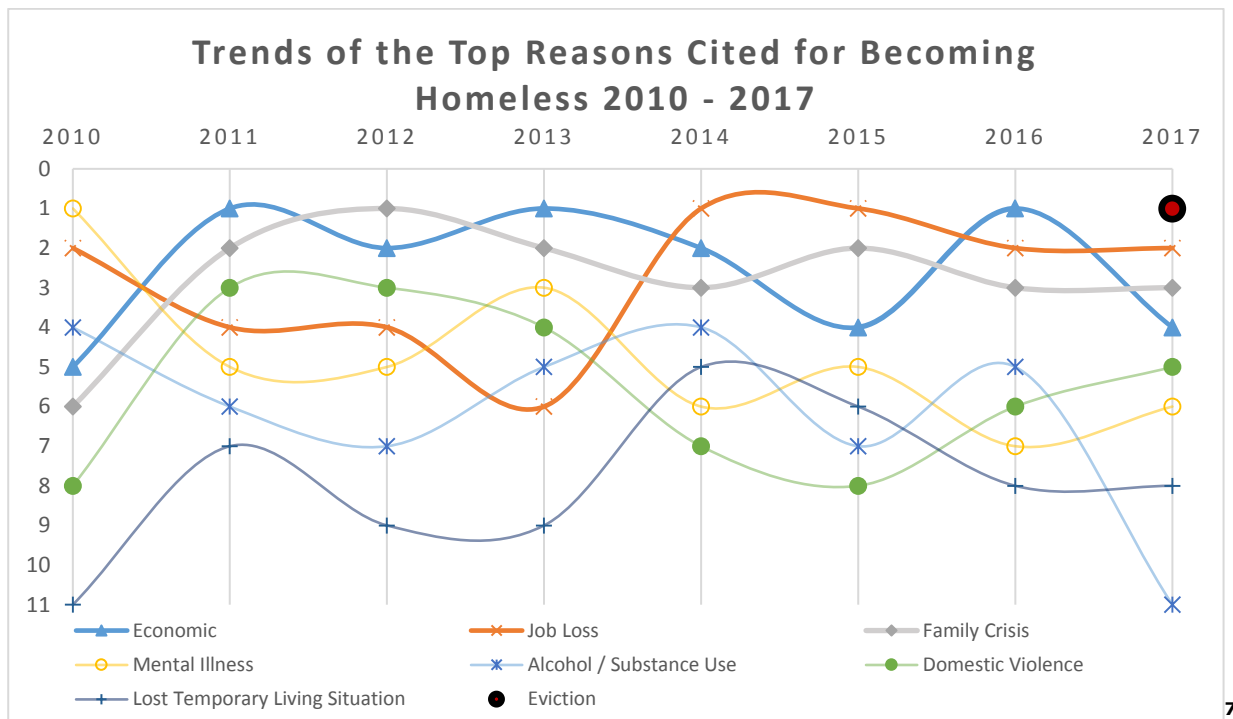
## 2017 PIT Count

### Top Reasons Cited as Cause of Homelessness

(Participants could select more than one reason)

	Number of Responses
1. Eviction*	83
2. Job Loss	76
3. Family Crisis	73
4. Economic	69
5. Domestic Violence	62
6. Mental Illness	48
7. Physical / Mental Disability	47
8. Lost Temporary Living Situation	48
9. Kicked Out / Left Home	42
10. Illness / Health Related	38
11. Alcohol / Substance Use	33
12. Personal Choice*	26

\*This was a new option added to the survey for 2017



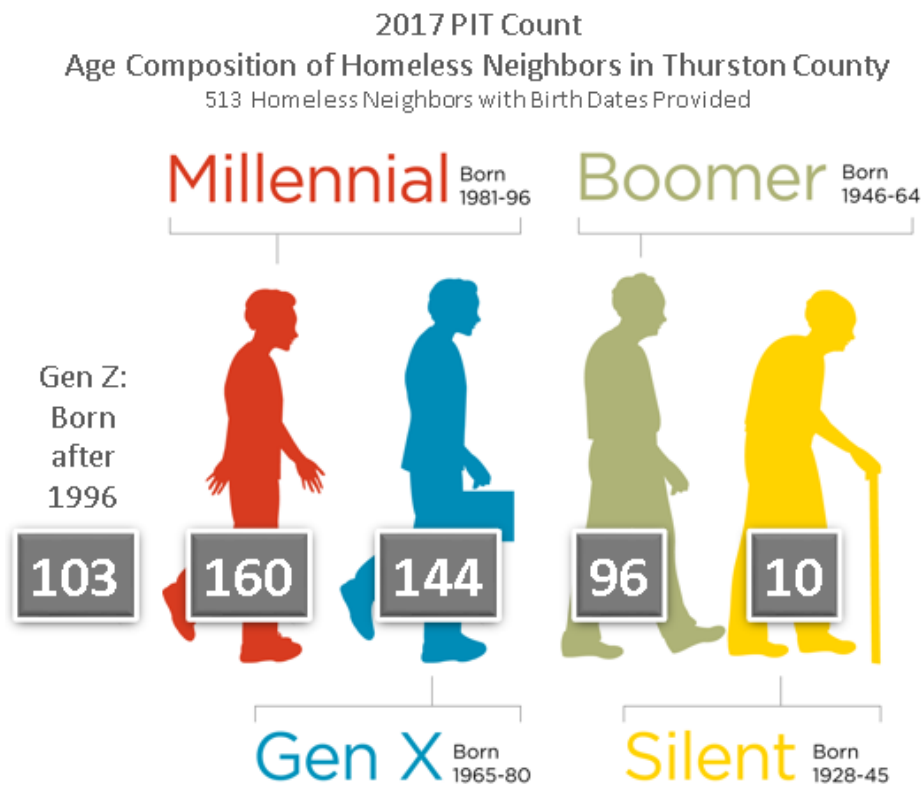
The graph above shows the ranking of the top reasons cited for becoming homeless each year since the 2010 PIT Count. A ranking of 1 is the most cited reason. While there are certainly a number of variables affecting the data validity, nonetheless, this trend analysis provides an interesting look at the leading causes of homelessness in Thurston County over the past eight years. Since 2014, “Economic”, “Job Loss”, and “Family Crisis” continue to be the 3 most cited reasons for the occurrence of homelessness in Thurston County. This year, with the addition of the option to choose “Eviction”, we saw the most survey participants cite this as a cause of becoming homeless.

### **2017 PIT Count: Income and Housing Data**

For the 2017 PIT Count, additional questions regarding income relative to housing search efforts were asked to survey participants in an effort to glean further insights from the broad macro-economic factors cited as the leading causes of homelessness over the past decade. The info-graphic following this report illustrates the efforts being undertaken by homeless neighbors in Thurston County, and the challenges they face to find housing even when they do have income. These survey findings may motivate a deeper look at the prevailing perception of the profile of homeless individuals and families in the Thurston County community and the actual support they need to maintain or return to housing stability.

<sup>7</sup> Data collected from Thurston County prior year census reports

## **2017 PIT Count: Age Specific and Key Demographic Data**



### **Key Demographic Breakdown from Survey results**

Includes data received from Thurston County Department of Corrections and Providence St. Peter's Hospital

Chronic Homeless	106
Veterans	56
Unaccompanied Youth <18 <sup>8</sup>	0
Families with children	77
Children <18	68
Seniors +55	66
Singles +24 - 54	231
18 - 24 YR	70

<sup>8</sup> Survey results did not show any unaccompanied youth under the age of 18. The Department of Commerce figures note 10 unaccompanied youth under age 18 who are homeless.



## **Summary and Recommendations**

As with all data collection, there are concerns regarding the validity of the collection and reporting process. For the 2016 PIT count, gathering survey participant signatures significantly decreased the likelihood of data duplication on reported information. However, as has been the struggle in previous years, the following variables must be acknowledged as it relates to data integrity:

1. *Known sections of homeless neighbors not surveyed.* Excluding entering into camps (even those that are known) for safety reasons decreases the population surveyed and reduces the number of homeless that are accounted for on the day of the PIT count. The total number reported - while higher than last year - is still viewed by service providers as only about one-third of the number of unique individuals and households seeking homeless services. This is supported by HMIS reports that are pulled quarterly by agencies.
2. *Rural Communities lacking service agencies with which to partner.* Facilitators of the 2016 PIT count worked to partner with as many agencies as were willing across the county. Some areas had only 1 agency that served homeless neighbors, and the survey volunteers were restricted to working within the business hours on the day of the count. This most likely reduced the reporting in those communities.
3. *HUD classification of "Inadequate Structure" as homeless not necessarily aligning with people's own perception of their circumstance.* HUD classifies those living in structures without any of the following: heat, running water, the ability to cook hot food, the ability to bathe, as homeless. There is a high likelihood that individuals in these circumstances do not equate themselves as being homeless and therefore are not seeking services nor participating in PIT count activities.
4. *School district homeless youth reports not included in HUD PIT count numbers.* School districts report the number of students living in unstable housing circumstances through the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI). However, a broader definition of "homeless" is used including students who are living "doubled up." While the PIT count may connect with some of these individuals, the number reported through OSPI has historically been much larger than the PIT counts. In 2016, school districts in Thurston County reported 1,770 students as homeless. The number of homeless students enrolled in Thurston County school districts in 2017 has not been reported yet.

In reviewing the information that was collected, the Thurston County 2017 PIT Count follows the historical trends for much of the demographic data reported in prior year PIT counts. Some of this may be due to the unfortunate continued participation of many of the same chronically homeless members of our community each year. But the data collected may also be showing the Thurston County community that the profile of homeless neighbors is perhaps becoming less speculative which allows the County and service providers to begin to look at the efficiency and effectiveness of the homeless service system in Thurston County as it relates to serving specific homeless subpopulations. Efforts are currently underway to evolve the homeless service system through continued refinement of the Coordinated Entry process for those in need of homeless assistance and will be incorporated into the County's revised 5 year plan to address homelessness and affordable housing.

The trends in the data about causes cited for homelessness is one area that may benefit from being further explored. Within the top reasons of "Economic," "Family Crisis," and "Job Loss"

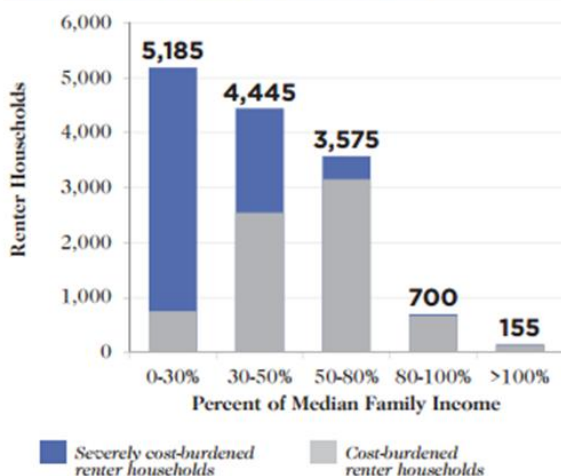
are opportunities to formulate more specific data collection points for example: 1) insights into more exact “economic” reasons that make this category a top cited reason, 2) data regarding time between job loss or family crisis and seeking homeless service assistance, 3) particular reasons that may benefit from more targeted prevention. Furthermore, breaking these reasons down by age provides additional insight into causes and circumstances that may have a greater impact on certain age groups.

Of course the single greatest “reason” affecting community members at risk of or currently experiencing homelessness continues to be the lack of affordable housing in Thurston County. The two charts below provide context for the large number of households in Thurston County (approximately 34,000) that are classified as cost-burdened or severely cost-burdened. This means that these households pay more than 30% or 50% respectively of gross wages towards housing. Expensive housing relative to wages spans the bottom half of the median household income spectrum and represents about 36% of all households in Thurston County who are unstably housed and at risk of becoming homeless.

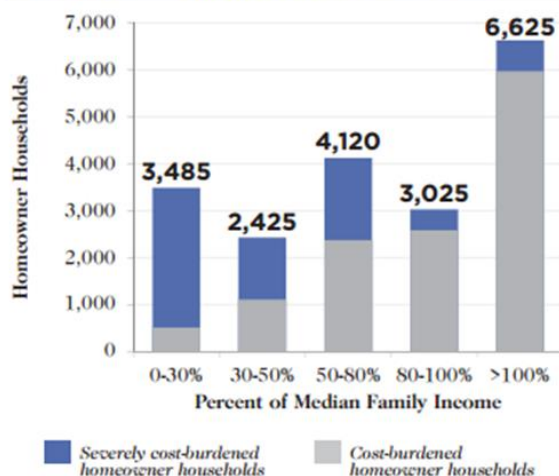
2015 Washington State Housing Needs Assessment: Thurston County

## Cost Burden

Cost-Burdened **Renter** Households



Cost-Burdened **Homeowner** Households



This profile of struggling households fundamentally redefines the perception of the circumstances facing people at risk of becoming homeless, and supports the PIT Count trends of “Economic” and “Job Loss” as consistent reasons leading to homelessness. At this level of need for affordable housing, government resources available to the homeless and affordable housing service system are insufficient. The revised 5 year plan to address homeless and affordable housing in Thurston County will need to explore and consider solutions involving private investment and public-private partnerships in addition to funding provided by federal, state, and local governments.

The results of the 2017 PIT Count continue to illustrate the pursuit of more coordinated efforts throughout the homeless service system to define both demographic data for trend analysis as well as system performance metrics that look at the effectiveness of services and prioritization of limited funding. The County and service agencies understand and are working on incorporating better data collection efforts into the renewed 5 year plan.

**2017 PIT Count Partner Agency / Roving Locations and Surveys Collected at Each**

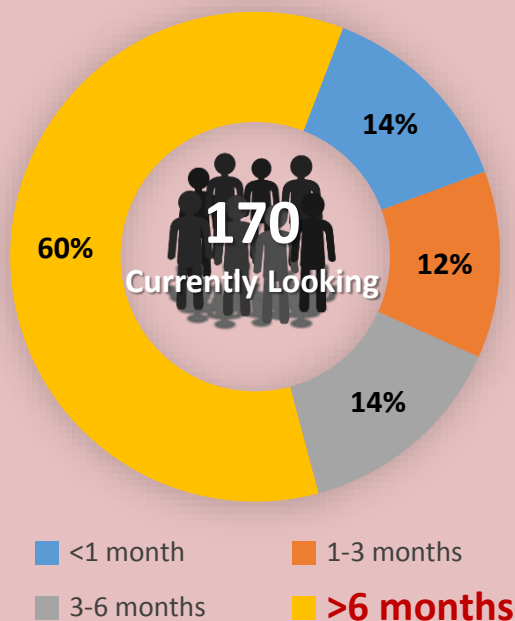
<b>Location</b>	<b>Surveys Collected</b>	<b>Area</b>
Census Jam (old Alpine Experience Building)	53	1
Crazy Faith	14	1
Family Support Center	29	1
Interfaith Works Warming Center	35	1
Lacey Veterans Services Hub	19	3
Pear Blossom Place (Family Support Center)	21	1
Rainier	4	5
ROOF Community Services (Rochester)	18	7
Rosie's Place (Community Youth Services)	34	1
Rover – Olympia downtown/East	3	1
Rover – Olympia West	5	2
Salvation Army	4	1
Sidewalk	11	1
Tenino	10	6
Union Gospel Mission	34	1
Yelm	14	5
<b>Total Surveys Collected</b>	<b>308</b>	

# 2 in 3

# Homeless Neighbors Surveyed in Thurston County are Currently Trying to Find Housing



## Time Spent Searching for Housing

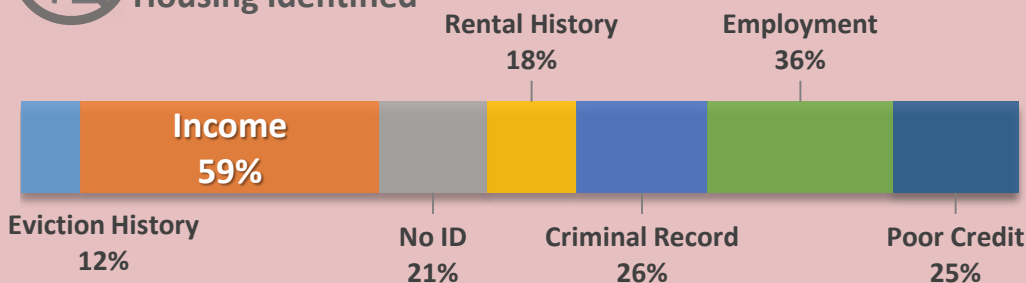


## Most Requested Services

Home Search Help	112	66%
Hot Shower	106	62%
Laundry	98	58%
Safe Storage	97	57%
Restroom	81	48%
Dental	78	46%
Job Search Help	72	42%
Day Center	71	42%
Counselor	57	34%
Medical	55	32%
Pet Care	35	21%
Utility Assistance	33	19%
Home Weatherization	18	11%
Landlord Disputes	14	8%



## Biggest Barriers to Housing Identified



## Education Completed

238 total responses

Some High School- 39

HS / GED - 102

Some College -67

Associates Degree -15

Bachelors Degree - 12

Masters Degree - 3



## 1 in 5

Households have monthly income over \$1000



## 1 in 3

Households looking for housing are Chronically Homeless

“

REMEMBER WHAT IT FELT LIKE TO BE EXCLUDED SO THAT YOU CAN HELP BUILD A COMMUNITY WHERE EVERYONE IS INCLUDED.

LISA FRIEDMAN; REMOVING "THE STUMBLING BLOCK"