Thurston County
2016 Homeless Point-in-time Count
Process and Survey Results

May 2016

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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The Homeless Point-in-time Count: Overview[1]

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[2]. The count takes place in January each year with the date set by HUD. For 2016, the date of the count was Thursday, January 28.

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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[1] 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

[2] 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: Thurston County Approach

For the past five years the PIT count in Thurston County was facilitated by the Thurston County Housing Authority, County staff, and by the City of Olympia with support in its most recent years from the Thurston County Homeless and Affordable Housing Coordinator. Organizing and executing a well-staffed, safe, and county-wide count that respects the efforts of volunteers and partner agencies in the process, requires a considerable time commitment; and as such, the facilitation of the 2016 PIT count was included as part of the direct responsibility of the Thurston County Homeless and Affordable Housing Coordinator. ACR Business Consulting is serving in this role.

For the 2016 PIT count in Thurston County, the goals were to: (1) maximize the scope of the one-day count while ensuring safety for all, (2) 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) design and document a Thurston County PIT Count manual and step-by-step approach for the County to reduce the future costs associated with this HUD requirement.

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. The county was divided into 7 areas, and partner agencies were identified within each area. In addition to agency locations, other public spaces such as parks, libraries, and key intersections were identified within the county areas. These landmarks were incorporated into walking or driving zones covered by "roving teams." Teams stationed at agencies, as well as those roving, worked 2- or 4-hour shifts, and were comprised of 4 volunteers unless otherwise requested by an agency. The service-based counts were mapped to agency hours of operation, and the street counts took place beginning at 5 a.m. and ending at 9 p.m. on January 28, 2016. The Artesian Well in Downtown Olympia was also established as the "Census Jam" location from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., where homeless individuals were invited to enjoy free hot coffee, live music, and the chance to win raffle prizes for survey participants. Due to the sensitivity and potential safety concerns, the count did not include going into homeless encampments or wooded areas.

Minimize Data Duplication to Improve Quality
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. In order to ensure more signatures, several key factors were taken into consideration to support the survey facilitators and participants. HUD requires specific questions to be asked and data collected, but the form is not organized to assist the flow of a natural conversation. For the 2016 PIT count, considerable time was taken to organize the survey forms provided by HUD

to accomplish this, along with two additional key changes: (1) answers to questions were listed as check boxes rather than open text boxes – this sped up the survey process and removed the need for facilitators or survey participants to write legibly (2) the survey itself was enlarged from standard 8.5 x 11 inch paper and formatted to 11 x 14 inch paper to make the font larger, include notes for facilitators to reference, and have each question in its own section to make data collection easier.

Throughout the County, **342 surveys were collected**. Of those, **299 survey participants provided a signature - 87% of the total**. This success rate can be attributed to three key factors: (1) survey volunteers focusing on making a connection with participants, (2) having the signature served as an entry into the raffle to win one of several prizes, as well as (3) the more carefully laid out survey forms that took the usability and user experience into account
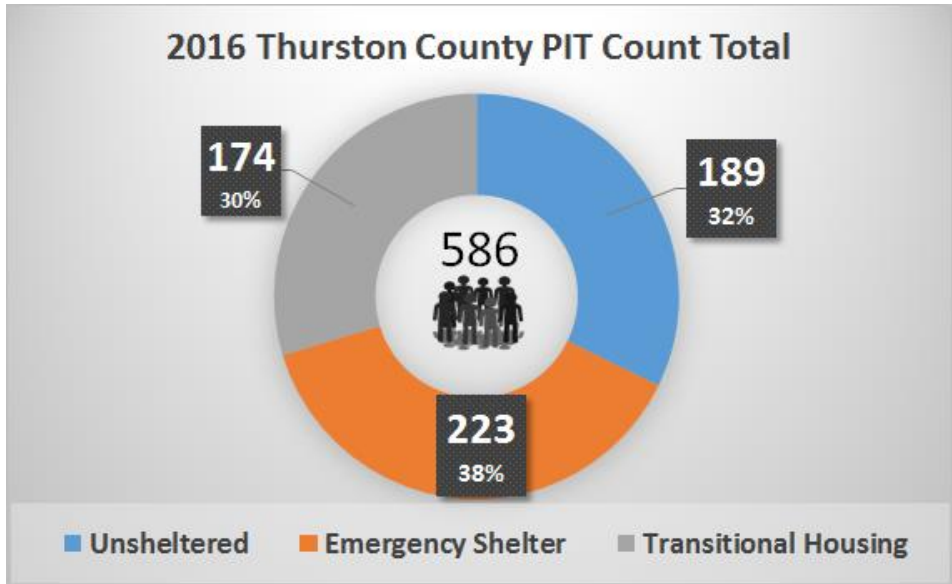
Incorporate the Human Connection
For the 2016 PIT count, the facilitators designed the ***I Count Thurston*** brand to build on efforts of prior years and organize the PIT count to broaden awareness and expand partnerships within the community. *I Count Thurston* established a strong Facebook presence and continues to engage the community on issues related to homelessness, which will help in preparing for the count in future years. The team launched the inaugural ***Happy Faces Campaign*** and successfully raised over $10,000 in donations from individuals and businesses in Thurston County. All of the funds and in-kind gifts went toward a robust "gifting" campaign, including a clothing giveaway at the Census Jam, 30 raffle prizes for survey participants and families, and 500 "goody-bags" filled with pizza coupons, snacks, instant coffee, socks, toothbrushes and toothpaste. The goody-bags were handed out throughout Thurston County to struggling neighbors whether they chose to participate in the survey or not, and they created a warm connection point for survey facilitators. The team partnered with Thurston County United Way and 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 reach its goal. It was a nice community event with great growth potential.

I Count Thurston recruited over 120 volunteers to assist with pre-census prep, day-of logistics, and survey facilitation. Volunteer hair stylists offered free haircuts to survey participants in Olympia during the PIT count. And the Artesian Well Census Jam brought together over 200 community members to enjoy hot coffee, giveaways, local live musicians, and dancing. Local photographers also donated hours of their time to document the sense of community and energy of the day.

Design and Document a Thurston County PIT Count Manual
The facilitation of the PIT count is a HUD requirement and takes real time, energy, and resources to be inclusive and impactful. Having facilitators of the PIT count serving in the Homeless and Affordable Housing Coordinator role provided Thurston County with the ability to look at adding efficiency to future counts. There were a number of local and national best practices that were incorporated into the 2016 PIT count as well as some enhancements made to better organize and manage the day-long and County-wide event. Approach, tools, and recommendations will be compiled into a handbook for the County to reduce the costs associated with facilitating the PIT count in future years.

Thurston County 2016 PIT Count Results

2016 Thurston County PIT Count Total

586

174 30%
189 32%
223 38%

■ Unsheltered   ■ Emergency Shelter   ■ Transitional Housing

Thurston County PIT Count Totals: 2006 - 2016

■ Unsheltered   ■ Emergency Shelter   ■ Transitional Housing   — Total

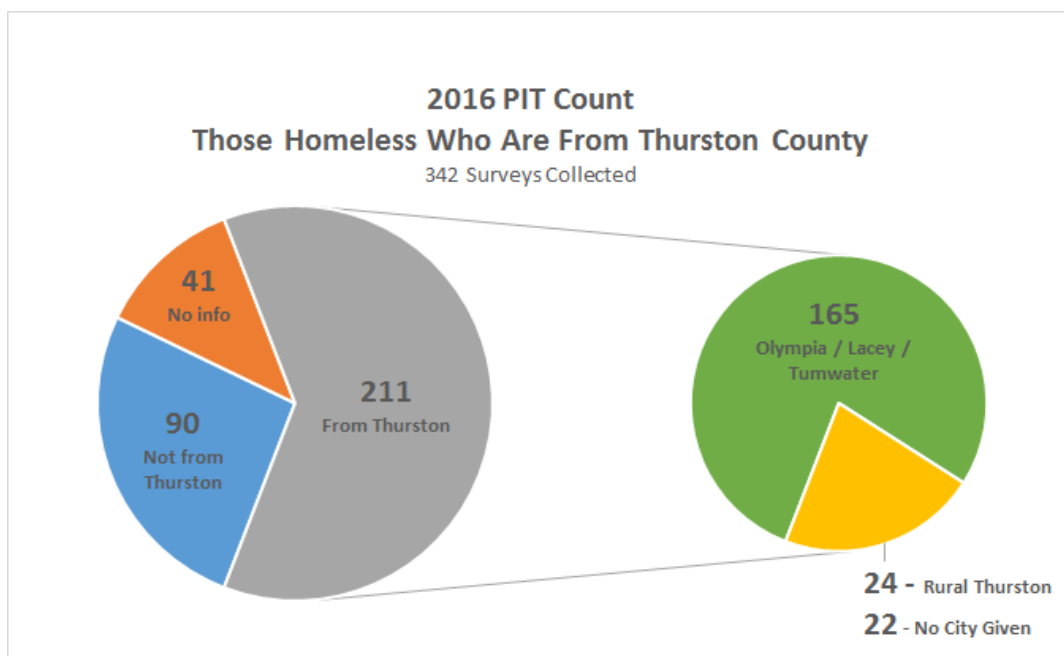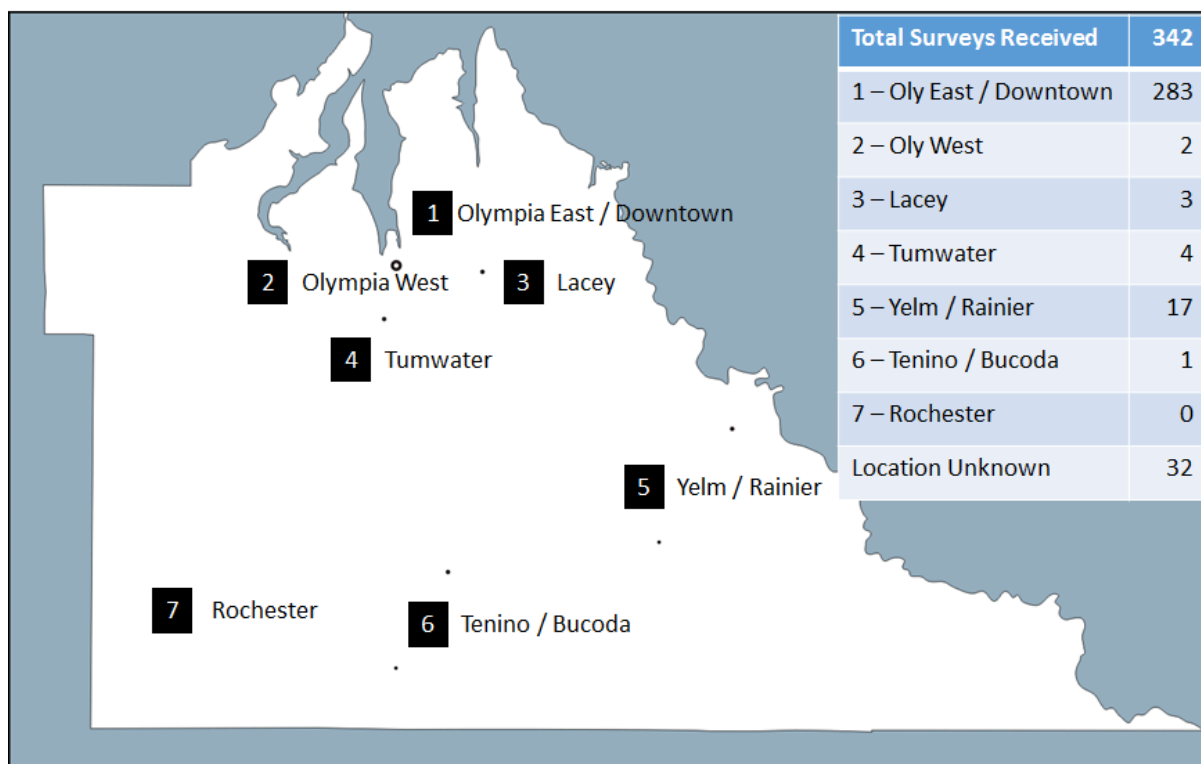| Year	Unsheltered	Emergency Shelter	Transitional Housing	Total
2006	122	156	163	441
2007	187	249	143	579
2008	194	168	100	462
2009	219	323	203	745
2010	363	181	432	976
2011	267	95	204	566
2012	164	167	377	708
2013	230	113	321	664
2014	257	172	147	576
2015	163	158	155	476
2016	189	223	174	586

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[3] Total PIT Count is the result of the combination of Surveys, HMIS Emergency Shelter and Transitional Housing entries on January 28, 2016. Confirmed by the WA State Department of Commerce.

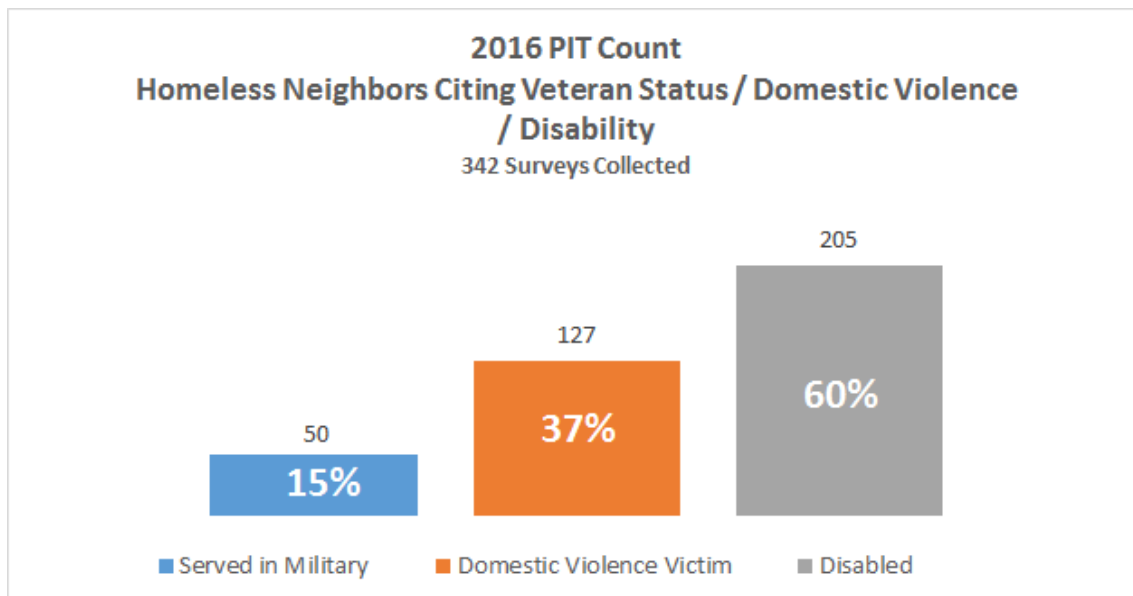## 2016 PIT Count: Demographic Data from 342 Surveys Collected

The following section provides a look at the results from the surveys collected during the PIT count.

2016 PIT Count Survey Map and Counts

Total Surveys Received	342
1 – Oly East / Downtown	283
2 – Oly West	2
3 – Lacey	3
4 – Tumwater	4
5 – Yelm / Rainier	17
6 – Tenino / Bucoda	1
7 – Rochester	0
Location Unknown	32

Map locations:
- 1 Olympia East / Downtown
- 2 Olympia West
- 3 Lacey
- 4 Tumwater
- 5 Yelm / Rainier
- 6 Tenino / Bucoda
- 7 Rochester

[4]

2016 PIT Count
Those Homeless Who Are From Thurston County
342 Surveys Collected

- 41 No info
- 90 Not from Thurston
- 211 From Thurston
  - 165 Olympia / Lacey / Tumwater
  - 24 - Rural Thurston
  - 22 - No City Given

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[4]2016 PIT Count List of Locations and Surveys Collected at each can be found at the end of this report.

2016 PIT Count
Gender Classification of Homeless Neighbors
342 Surveys Collected

Male 226	Female 99	No info given 16	1

■ Male ■ Female ■ Transgender ■ No info given

Gender Classification of Homeless Neighbors
in Thurston County 2010 - 2016

Year	Female	Male
2010	43%	57%
2011	42%	56%
2012	23%	67%
2013	23%	77%
2014	39%	57%
2015	38%	59%
2016	29%	66%

■ Male ■ Female ■ Transgender <1%

5

2016 PIT Count
Homeless Neighbors Citing Veteran Status / Domestic Violence / Disability
342 Surveys Collected

Served in Military	Domestic Violence Victim	Disabled
50 / 15%	127 / 37%	205 / 60%

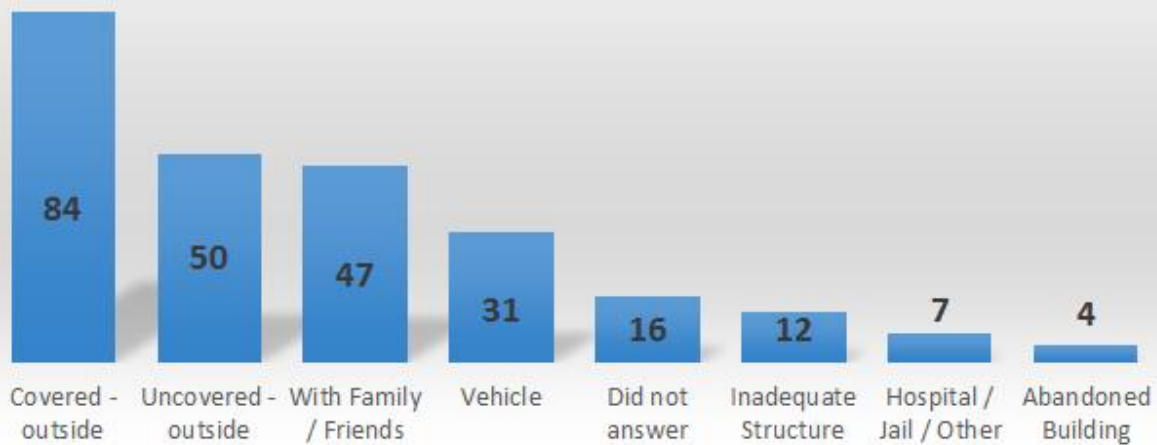■ Served in Military ■ Domestic Violence Victim ■ Disabled

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5 Data collected from Thurston County prior year census reports

2016 PIT Count
A Closer Look at Disabilities Reported by Homeless Neighbors

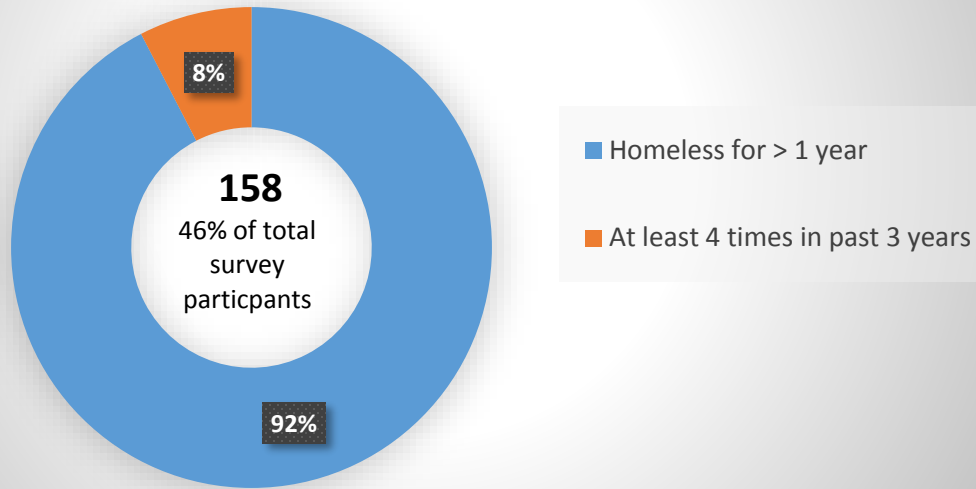205 Reporting at least 1 disability

- Chronic Substance Use — 10%
- Permanent Physical Disability — 27%
- Developmental Disability — 9%
- Mental Health — 39%
- Chronic Health Problem — 14%
- HIV/AIDS — 1%
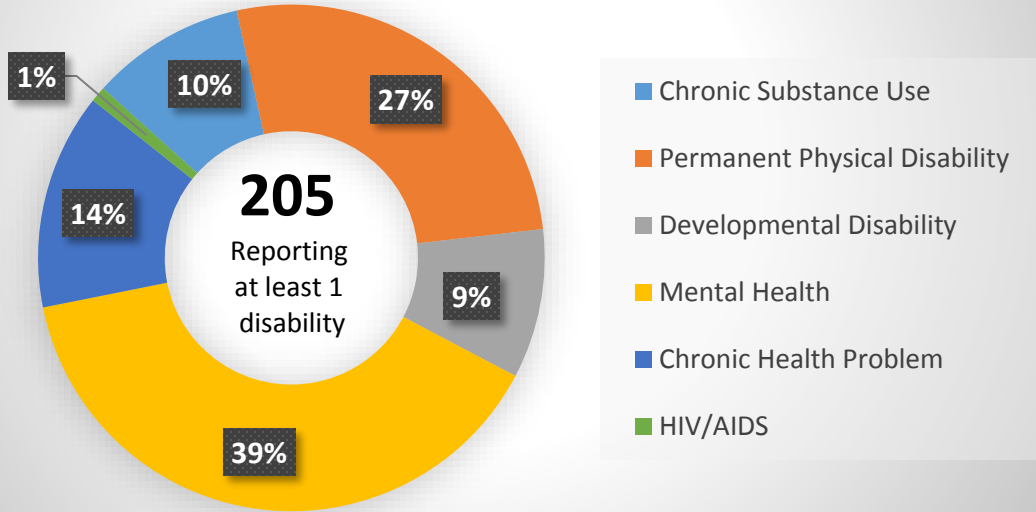
2016 PIT Count
Where Homeless Neighbors Slept the Night Prior to the Count
(excluding Shelter and Transitional Housing Responses)

Covered - outside	Uncovered - outside	With Family / Friends	Vehicle	Did not answer	Inadequate Structure	Hospital / Jail / Other	Abandoned Building
84	50	47	31	16	12	7	4

2016 PIT Count
Chronically Homeless Neighbors
342 Surveys Collected

158
46% of total survey particpants

8%

92%
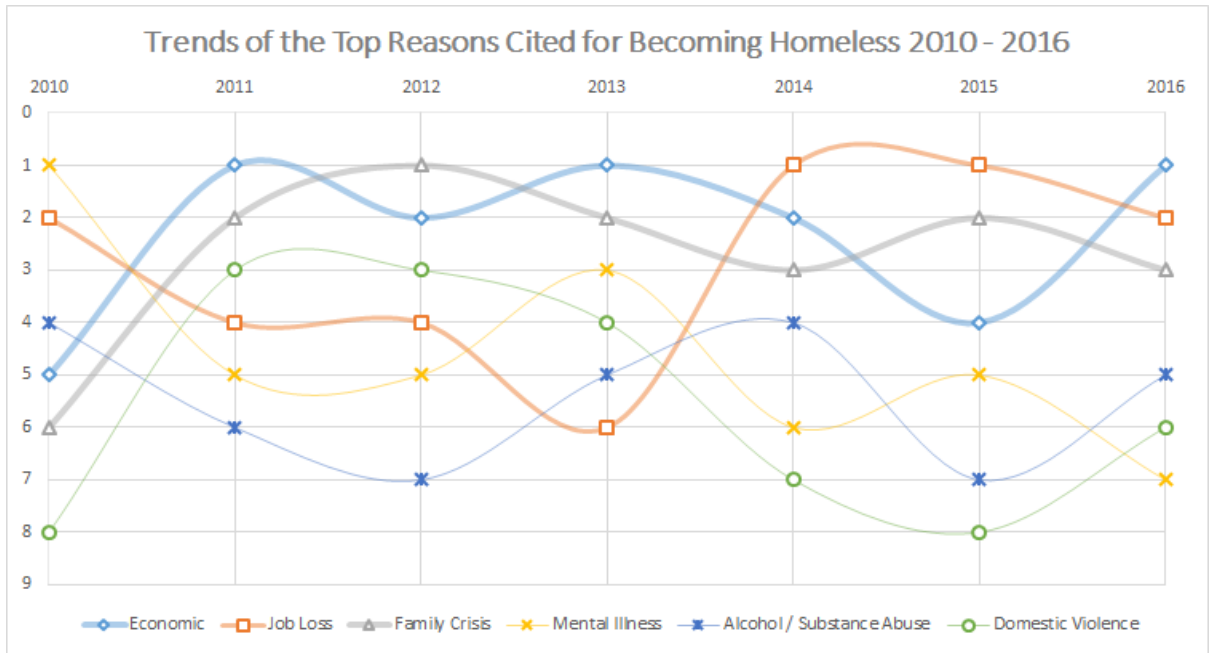
- Homeless for > 1 year
- At least 4 times in past 3 years

2016 PIT Count
Top Reasons Cited as Cause of Homelessness
(Participants could select more than one reason)

	Number of Responses
1. Economic	81
2. Job Loss	80
3. Family Crisis	73
4. Kicked Out / Left Home	61
5. Alcohol / Substance Use	48
6. Domestic Violence	47
7. Lost Temporary Living Situation	45
8. Mental Illness	44

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6 "Chronically homeless" is defined in section 401(2) of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, 42 U.S.C. 11360 (McKinney-Vento Act or Act), as an individual or family that is homeless and resides in a place not meant for human habitation, a safe haven, or in an emergency shelter, and has been homeless and residing in such a place for at least 1 year or on at least four separate occasions in the last 3 years. The statutory definition also requires that the individual or family has a head of household with a diagnosable substance use disorder, serious mental illness, developmental disability, posttraumatic stress disorder, cognitive impairments resulting from a brain injury, or chronic physical illness or disability.
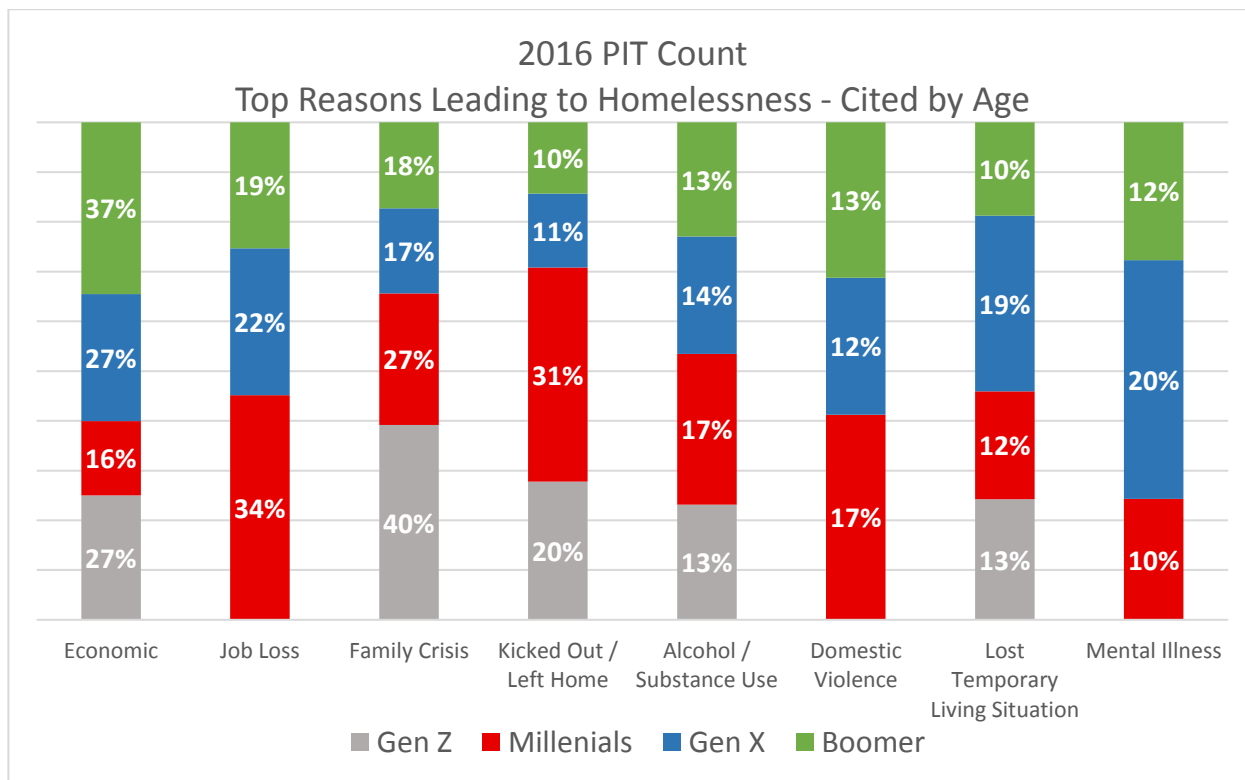Source: https://www.hudexchange.info/resources/documents/Defining-Chronically-Homeless-Final-Rule.pdf

Trends of the Top Reasons Cited for Becoming Homeless 2010 – 2016

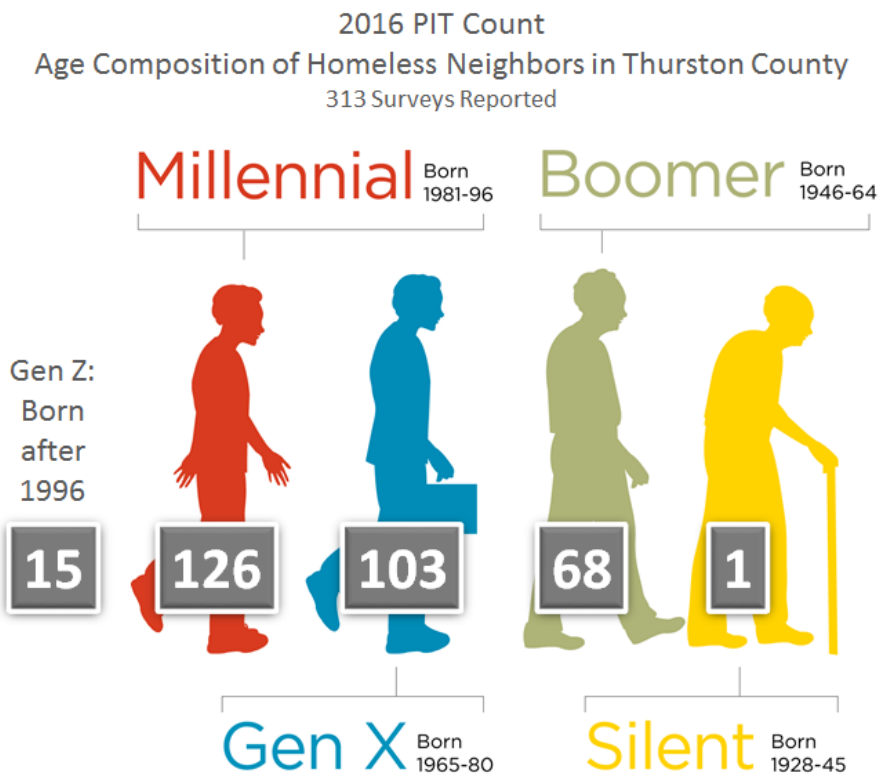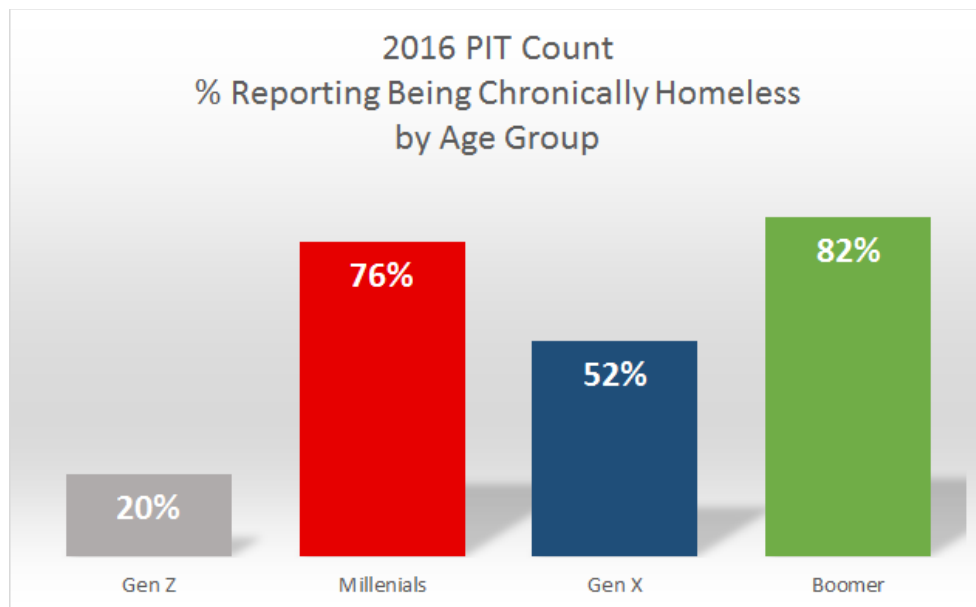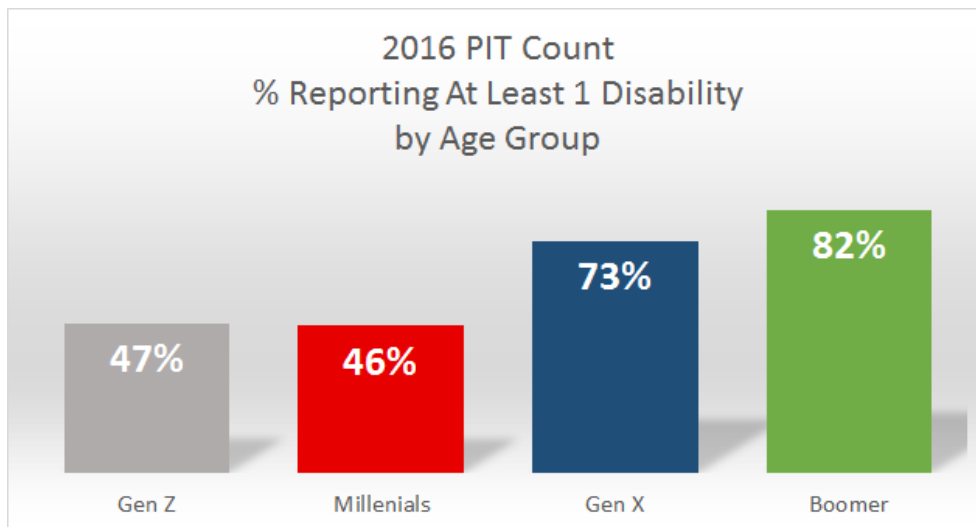Legend: Economic, Job Loss, Family Crisis, Mental Illness, Alcohol / Substance Abuse, Domestic Violence

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 seven years. This along with the following age specific analysis and County data on cost-burdened households 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.

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[7] Data collected from historical Thurston County PIT Count reports

2016 PIT Count: Age Specific Data

2016 PIT Count
Age Composition of Homeless Neighbors in Thurston County
313 Surveys Reported

Millennial Born 1981-96   **Boomer** Born 1946-64

Gen Z: Born after 1996

15   **126**   **103**   **68**   **1**

Gen X Born 1965-80   **Silent** Born 1928-45

2016 PIT Count
Top Reasons Leading to Homelessness - Cited by Age

Reason	Gen Z	Millenials	Gen X	Boomer
Economic	27%	16%	27%	37%
Job Loss	34%	—	22%	19%
Family Crisis	40%	27%	17%	18%
Kicked Out / Left Home	20%	31%	11%	10%
Alcohol / Substance Use	13%	17%	14%	13%
Domestic Violence	—	17%	12%	13%
Lost Temporary Living Situation	13%	12%	19%	10%
Mental Illness	—	10%	20%	12%

Legend: ■ Gen Z   ■ Millenials   ■ Gen X   ■ Boomer

2016 PIT Count
% Reporting At Least 1 Disability
by Age Group

Gen Z: 47%
Millenials: 46%
Gen X: 73%
Boomer: 82%

2016 PIT Count
% Reporting Being Chronically Homeless
by Age Group

Gen Z: 20%
Millenials: 76%
Gen X: 52%
Boomer: 82%

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.

In reviewing the information that was collected, the Thurston County 2016 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 housing assistance and will be incorporated into the County's revised 10 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 36,000) 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.

Cost Burden

Cost-Burdened *Renter* Households
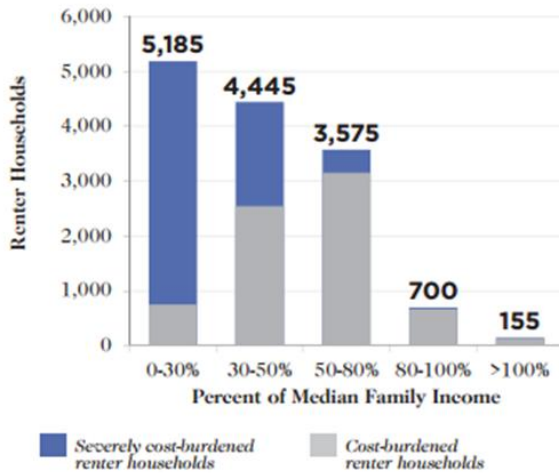
Cost-Burdened *Homeowner* Households
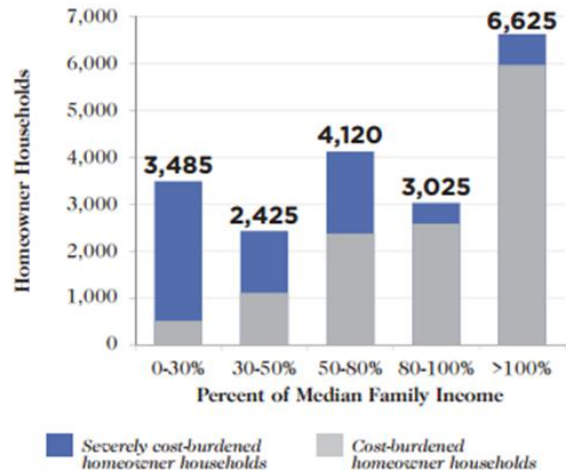
This profile of struggling households fundamentally redefines the perception of the circumstances facing people at risk of becoming homeless, and supports the PIT Count trends of "Economic" and "Job Loss" as consistent reasons leading to homelessness. At this level of need for affordable housing, government resources available to the homeless and affordable housing service system are insufficient. The revised 10 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 2016 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 10 year plan.

2016 PIT Count Partner Agency / Roving Locations and Surveys Collected at Each

	Surveys Collected	Area
Artesian Well - Census Jam	105	1
Warming Center - First Christian Church (Interfaith Works)	66	1
Salvation Army	31	1
Union Gospel Mission	27	1
Olympia East Rovers	16	1
Sidewalk	12	1
Family Support Center	11	1
Crazy Faith	11	1
Community Youth Services	4	1
Washington Department of Veteran Affairs	0	1
Olympia West Rovers	2	2
Lacey Rovers	3	3
Worksource	4	4
Tumwater Rovers	0	4
Yelm Community Services	17	5
Tenino Food Bank	1	6
Roof Community Services	0	7
Location Unknown	32	
Total Surveys Collected	342	