



“We’re not bad people...  
we’re people in a bad situation.”



# 2012 THURSTON COUNTY HOMELESS CENSUS REPORT

Who’s Homeless, and Why?

JULY 2012

Produced by a countywide partnership in conjunction  
with the Ten-Year Plan to End Homelessness

# 2012 Thurston County Homeless Census Report

## A Snapshot of Who is Homeless and Why

July 2012

*Produced by a Countywide Partnership in Conjunction with the  
Ten-Year Plan to End Homelessness*

### 2012 THURSTON COUNTY HOMELESS CENSUS REPORT

The 2012 Thurston County Homeless Census Report is the product of the annual “**Point in Time Count of Homeless Persons**” coordinated statewide by the Washington State Department of Commerce. The results of the Thurston County Homeless Census are included along with the data from all other Washington Counties on the Department of Commerce website located at:

<http://www.commerce.wa.gov/site/1064/default.aspx>

This report is presented on behalf of the Thurston County Board of Commissioners and the Thurston County HOME Consortium, an eight jurisdiction inter-governmental body that governs the County’s allocation of federal HOME dollars along with the state funded Homeless Housing and Affordable Housing Programs.

**Note on photographs:** Unless otherwise noted, this report contains many stock photographs from the internet because local homeless people did not want their photographs to be published.

**Questions, comments, or to request a digital copy of this report:**

Anna Schlecht  
Homeless Census Coordinator  
[aschlech@ci.olympia.wa.us](mailto:aschlech@ci.olympia.wa.us) 360-753-8183

### CREDITS

#### **County Board of Commissioners:**

Cathy Wolfe, Commission Chair, District 1  
Karen Valenzuela, Commission Vice-Chair, District 3  
Sandra Romero, Commission, District 2

#### **Thurston County HOME Consortium:**

Andrea Fowler, **Bucoda** Councilmember  
Ron Lawson, **Lacey** Councilmember  
Stephen Buxbaum, **Olympia** Mayor  
Dennis McVey, **Rainier** Councilmember  
Robert Scriber, **Tenino** Mayor Pro-Tem  
Neil McClanahan, **Tumwater** Councilmember and HOME Consortium Vice Chair  
Mike McGowan, **Yelm** Councilmember and HOME Consortium Chair  
Karen Valenzuela, **Thurston County** Commissioner

**Thurston County Staff:**

Don Sloma, Director, Department of Public Health  
Mark Freedman, Social Service Division Director  
Dwight Edwards, Community Housing Program Coordinator

**City of Olympia Staff:**

Steve Friddle, Community Services Manager  
Anna Schlecht, Olympia Housing Program Manager  
Heather Reed, Olympia Housing Program Specialist

**Contracted employees:**

Selena Kilmoyer, Rural Census Outreach Worker  
Steve Briggs, Urban Census Outreach Worker  
Laurian Weisser, Urban Census Outreach Worker

**Housing Program Interns:**

Alex Daye, Evergreen State College  
Luisia Funk, Evergreen State College  
Marcus Godby, Evergreen State College

Jessica Honiker, Evergreen State College  
Kevin Petrie, Evergreen State College  
Shawn Sanderson, Evergreen State College

**Agency and Faith Community Contacts:**

Stacey Saunders, Behavioral Health Resources  
Phil Owen, Bread & Roses  
Dale Starkweather, Camp Quixote  
Jennifer Collier, Capital Clubhouse  
Rob Richards, Capital Clubhouse  
Bary Hanson, Catholic Community Services -  
Drexel House  
Ann Eddington, Choice Regional Health Network  
Phil Prietto, City Gates Ministries  
Maureen McLemore, Community Youth  
Services  
Nicole Ketcherside, Community Youth Services  
Dae Shogren, Community Youth Services  
Schelli Slaughter, Family Support Center  
Patty Gregory, Family Support Center  
Amy Walters, First Christian Church  
Tammie Smith, Housing Authority of Thurston  
County  
Danny Kadden, Interfaith Works  
Jill Kruger, Low Income Housing Institute  
Tim Langan, Olympia Gospel Mission

Pastor Paul Jones, Olympia Reality Church  
Angela Thompson, Out of the Woods Shelter  
Rosalinda Noriega, Partners in Prevention  
Brit Pomush, SafePlace  
Steve Beadle, Salvation Army  
Phil Owen, SideWalk  
Jill Esbeck, SideWalk  
Harri-Ann Ellis, Thurston County Jail  
Donna Kelly, Thurston County Health Department  
Linda Loyale, Thurston County Veterans  
Assistance Fund Manager  
Katherine Cook, Veterans Affairs Supportive  
Housing Coordinator  
Caesar Plasencia, Department of Veterans Affairs  
Cindy Cecil-Marchand, Yelm Community  
Services Center  
Bill Mercer, Yelm Community Cross Roads  
Covenant Church  
Pastor Jerry Collell, Yelm Emanuel Lutheran  
Church

**Census Volunteers:**

Danny Kadden, Mark Collins, Crispin Collins, Heather Reed, Luke Burns, Sandra Kowalski, Paul Guggenmos, Joshua Guggenmos, Mandy Wilson, Nona White, Tom Oliva - Tumwater City Council, Karen Valenzuela - Thurston County Commission, Stephen Buxbaum - Olympia Mayor, Julie Hankins - City of Olympia Council, Stephen Langer - City of Olympia Council, Anneliese Langer, Mary Vent, Torrey Vent, Mark and Marie Kitabayashi, Mary Abramson, Mark Kelly, Curt Andino, Keith Stahley, Jamie Swenson, Jane Sabes, Scott Hanauer, Ian Jones, Sally Tousaint, Kathryn Cook, Alex Daye, Paul Knox, Wade McReynolds, Dae Shogren, Chole Ketcherside

**Focus Group Participants:**

Faith community leaders; Non-profit organization representatives; Capital Clubhouse staff and members; Camp Quixote residents; Olympia Parking Business Improvement Area (PBIA); Yelm area service providers; homeless activists; Class of Evergreen State College classes, “Suburban Nation”; Downtown residents.

**Census Worker Volunteers:**

The census was staffed by approximately 130 volunteers from faith-based communities, nonprofit organizations, local and state government, business community, local high schools, and many other parts of the community.

**Thurston County contracted with the City of Olympia to conduct the 2012 Annual Homeless Count and produce the Homeless Census Report.**

*Author: Anna Schlecht, Thurston County Homeless Census Coordinator*

*Design and Layout: Heather Reed, Housing Program Assistant*

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# CITIZEN SUMMARY

## Overview

On January 29, 2012, Thurston County participated in the statewide annual **“Point in Time Count of Homeless Persons,”** referred to as the “Homeless Census.” Census results are reported to the state and federal governments to ensure a proportionate level of public funding for local shelters, transitional housing, and related supportive services. These numbers also help to create the most accurate picture of homelessness throughout our state and across our nation.

Locally, census results are presented to all community stakeholders—concerned citizens, policy makers, funders, service providers, and the homeless themselves. Together, we can look at who is homeless, why they are homeless, and what resources we have to offer. Analyzing these three elements allows us to develop more effective responses to homelessness, which is essential to meeting the county’s Ten-Year Plan goal to reduce homelessness by half by the year 2015.

## Homeless Census Numbers

This report presents a snapshot of homelessness in Thurston County drawn from three sources of data. The primary source is the January 2011 County Homeless Census that found **724 homeless individuals**. This represents a **64% increase from the 2006** baseline number of 441 homeless people, but a 26% drop from 2010’s high of 976 homeless individuals. *(For a more thorough examination of who is homeless and why, please go to Chapter 2 on page 9.)*

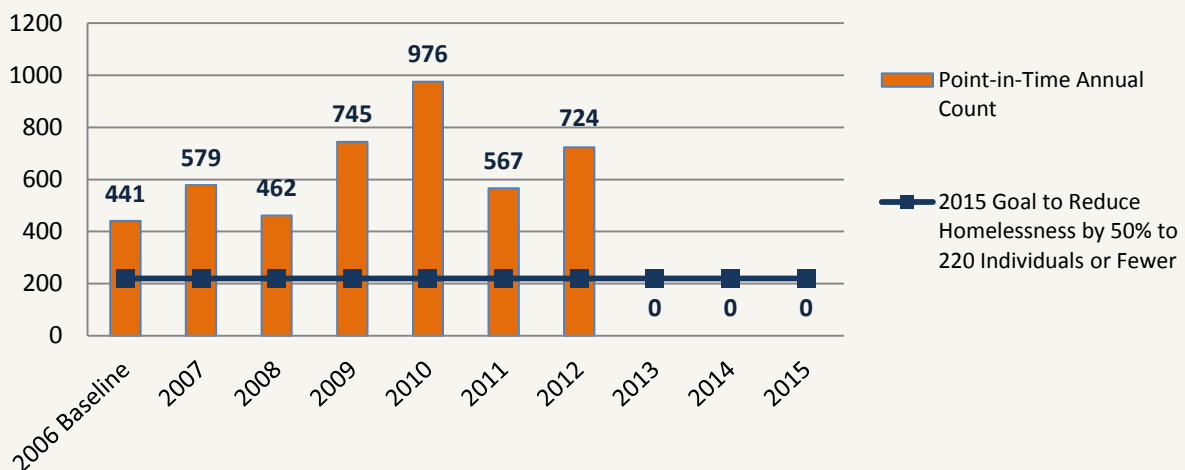
The second source is a parallel census, conducted by the county’s school districts, that found the number of **homeless public school students** (Kindergarten - 12<sup>th</sup> grade) as **1,126, which is a 78% increase since the 2006** baseline of 654 students, but down 8% from 2010’s high of 1,269. *(Please see “Correlation of School District Numbers with County Census Numbers” page 22.)*

Together these sources reflect an *increase* in homelessness since 2006, not the 50% reduction as per the county’s Ten-Year Plan goal. This report analyzes who is homeless and why. It also looks at available resources and presents recommendations for action drawn from community partners.

### 2006 - 2012 County Point-in-Time Count

**Goal:** Reduce Homelessness in Thurston County by 50% to 220 homeless people by July 2015

**Reality:** Homelessness increased by 36% since 2006



This chart shows the progress of the **“10-Year Plan to Reduce Homelessness”** by half. Starting with 441 homeless people in 2006, the goal is to reduce homelessness to 220 people by the year 2015, with the goal represented by the dark blue line. In 2012, the Census found 724 homeless people.



## Citizen Summary: 2012 Census Results in Context of the Ten-Year Plan

This year's census total of 724 represents a 64% increase, or 283 more people than identified in the 2006 census of 441 people. However, this year's results indicate a significant 26% drop in homelessness from the 2010 all-time high of 976.

Once statewide data is released, the final version of this report will include some analysis of how other counties across the state are doing in their efforts to reduce homelessness.

Given the census results on page one, it appears that our county is making progress in reducing homelessness. Reasons are likely to include:

- 1) **Stronger Emphasis on "Rapid Re-housing"** through HOME Consortium's increased funding of rental assistance.
- 2) **Stronger Economy** with a local reduction in unemployment.
- 3) **Better Coordination** of referrals between local non-profit service and shelter providers through the work of SideWalk (a new coordinated point of entry program based in Olympia).
- 4) The **Strong Leadership of the HOME Citizens Advisory Committee (HCAC)**.

Together, these four elements are helping to turn the tide of homelessness in Thurston County.



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*"It's really pretty simple.  
The answer to homelessness  
is more housing."  
– Participant of Downtown  
Residents Focus Group*

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## Citizen Summary: Countywide Actions to Reduce Homelessness

Since 2006, Thurston County has invested nearly **\$12 million dollars to support many successful projects and programs** to reduce homelessness.

These funds have been invested in providing affordable housing, rental assistance and other essential services to reduce homelessness throughout the county.

The funding for these projects and programs is managed by the Thurston County HOME Consortium, an eight member inter-jurisdictional body composed of Thurston County, Bucoda, Lacey, Olympia, Rainier Tenino, Tumwater and Yelm. The Consortium governs the use of federal HOME funds and the two state-funded programs called the Homeless Housing Program and the Affordable Housing Program, which are funded by recording fee dollars.

During program year 2011 (September 1, 2011 – August 31, 2012) the HOME Consortium invested \$1,867,402 of federal and local funds in local projects and programs intended to alleviate homelessness (see Appendix G, page 56). Notable accomplishments include:

- **Homeless Coordinator Hired:** Thurston County hired a locally renowned expert – **Theresa Slusher** - to provide strategic coordination for the network of service, shelter and housing providers.

**Rapid Re-housing:** 132 households were quickly “re-housed” with rental housing vouchers.

- **Rental Housing Improvement:** 20 Units of multi-family housing renovation of “**Killion Court**” apartments in Yelm by the Community Action Council of Lewis, Mason and Thurston Counties (*pending*).
- **Housing Rehabilitation:** Eight units of owner-occupied homes were rehabilitated (essential home repairs) in rural communities by the Housing Authority of Thurston County.
- **More Housing for Low-Income Homeowners:** Habitat for Humanity will purchase materials for five units of housing at the “**Wood’s Glen**” project in Lacey.
- **More Services:** 12 Social service agencies received support for operations and maintenance costs.

Together these projects and programs provided housing and essential services that helped hundreds of households across Thurston County in 2012.

The census results do show a 64% increase in homelessness since 2006. However, as shown above, a significant number of homeless and at-risk people were assisted, likely preventing them from becoming homeless.

If not for the funding provided through the HOME Consortium, the rate of homelessness in Thurston County would be significantly higher.



*Rapid Re-housing gets families back into housing faster and back on their feet quicker*

## Citizen Summary: Recommendations for Responding to Homelessness

The 2012 Homeless census results show us who is homeless and why, along with an overview of the existing shelter and housing resources. This information provides a useful framework to explore more effective ways to reduce homelessness. During the first seven years of communitywide efforts throughout Thurston County, we have not reduced homelessness by half as per the Ten-Year Plan goal; instead we have a 64% increase in the number of homeless people. **However**, we are turning the tide from the high point in 2010.

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*Not unlike efforts to cure cancer, stakeholders must examine existing approaches and consider new “treatments” using best practices and new ideas. While we may not “cure” homelessness quickly, we can certainly find better ways to reduce it.*

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A series of focus groups looked at the census results and discussed how to respond. An overview of the focus group process is included in the section on “Methodology” on page 48 and paraphrased reports from the focus groups are presented in Appendix A, page 1. Following is a summary of their recommendations:

- **Build Community Awareness:** Understanding multiplies our effectiveness, mobilizes more people and generates new ideas to resolve homelessness. Provide “plain talk” information that explains homelessness to people not already involved. (3<sup>rd</sup> year in a row)
- **Day Center:** Offer a welcoming place for people to get off the street. This helps homeless people and reduces conflict between the business community and street-dependent populations. (2<sup>nd</sup> year in a row)
- **More Affordable Housing:** Best solution to homelessness is to provide more affordable housing. Support emergency shelters, but **PRIORITIZE** Rapid Re-housing (programs that get homeless people back into housing as soon as possible) and **Housing First** (programs that stabilize people first with housing, and provide supportive services second). (3<sup>rd</sup> year in a row)



*Day Centers provide daytime options for the homeless*

- **More Public Bathrooms:** Designate “**Homeless-Friendly**” public bathrooms that are open 24 hours a day. Many homeless people have no available bathroom or bathing facilities and risk arrest for the most basic of human needs.
- **Safe Parking Program:** Accommodate people already living in their cars; provide case management and secure parking locations for homeless people at a low cost to benefit ratio. (2<sup>nd</sup> Year in a row)
- **Don’t Criminalize Homelessness:** Develop public policy to resolve conflicts between street-dependent populations, business owners, and other stakeholders. (2<sup>nd</sup> Year in a row)





# OVERVIEW OF THE HOMELESS CENSUS

## Purpose of the Point in Time Count of Homeless People

Each year at the end of January, Thurston County participates in a statewide effort to conduct a census of homeless people and then produces a report examining the results. As a **“Point in Time”** census, this represents a finite count of people from a specific night—January 29, 2012, selected as the end of the coldest month of the year. This homeless census report serves to:

1. **Examine Who’s Homeless and Why** by obtaining the most accurate census of homeless people, the causes of their homelessness, and other useful demographic information;
2. **Quantify Needs** by reporting the number and demographics of homeless people, which in turn brings in federal and state dollars to provide homeless shelter, transitional housing, and other services;
3. **Assess Resources** by tracking currently available housing and service resources; and
4. **Foster Analysis and Refine Strategies** by examining needs and resources and exploring better strategies for local responses to homelessness.



*A one-size-fits-all approach to shelter won’t work - communities should work to meet the diverse needs of their homeless population, regardless of gender identity, sexual orientation or race*

## Definitions of Homelessness

This census report is primarily based on the **state definition of homelessness**, which includes people living in:

1. **Emergency shelter;**
2. **Transitional housing;**
3. **Unsheltered** (in places not meant for human habitation such as cars, tents, parks, sidewalks, abandoned buildings, on the street); and,
4. **Substandard housing** defined as a dwelling lacking drinking water, restroom, heat, ability to cook hot food, or ability to bathe.

This definition derives from the **federal definition** of homelessness, which comes from the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). HUD defines homelessness as (1) an individual who lacks a fixed, regular and adequate nighttime residence; and (2) an individual who has a primary nighttime residence that is:

- A supervised publicly or privately operated shelter designed to provide temporary living accommodations (including welfare hotels, congregate shelters, and transitional housing for the mentally ill);
- An institution that provides a temporary residence for individuals intended to be institutionalized; or
- A public or private place not designed for, or ordinarily used as, a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings.

For the purposes of this count, **transitional housing** refers to housing with a 2-year stay limit where being homeless is a prerequisite for eligibility. Transitional housing also typically offers case management services that are required as part of the program. Persons in transitional housing programs that allow them to continue living permanently in housing after a transition period (“transition in place”) are not considered homeless if participation in case management is not a condition of residency.

## Other People without Permanent Homes

The Homeless Census also collects information on other people without permanent homes in order to capture a broader range of people who impact social and shelter services, including:

- People staying with friends and family.
- People held in jails or medical institutions who will be released to homelessness.



*Street-dependent youth often form “street families” to survive*

These numbers are useful for understanding the impact of people in jails or institutions who will be released to homelessness. It is also helpful in looking at the people who temporarily stay with friends or family, many of whom may cycle to living in their cars or homeless shelters. This standard produced the numbers referred to as the “county census” count of homeless individuals. All data presented herein will cite the standard as either “state count” or “full count.”

### 2012 Census Data Validity

Statewide, the Homeless Census does provide the single best measure of how successful we have been at reducing homelessness. However, as with all statistical studies, it is useful to examine the issues that may compromise the validity of the Homeless Census. Following is a list of issues that may have affected the accuracy of this census:

#### 1. Mid-January Ice Storm Dispersed Homeless People and made Homeless Camp Sites Inaccessible

A late January ice storm created dangerous conditions in the woods, eliminating access to the traditional areas of homeless camps. Most public parks were closed due to hazardous conditions related to hanging tree limbs and fallen trees. Additionally, numerous unsheltered homeless people had abandoned their cars and camps due to the freezing conditions, and to avoid being crushed by falling trees or buried by heavy snowfall.

#### 2. Competency in Data Entry in State Database

Many agencies are still building their competency at entering data into the State database, called the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS)

to manage the statewide Homeless Census data. Efforts to improve HMIS reporting accuracy is a high priority for the new County Homeless Coordinator.

#### 3. Non-cooperation by Some Unsheltered Homeless Populations

Unsheltered homeless people continue to worry that their participation in the Census will lead to camp clearances or police harassment, and they further express a general distrust of government. Service providers and some focus group participants confirm that this perception is widespread among unsheltered people.

These concerns stem from the fact that most unsheltered people must break either rules or laws to sleep in cars, abandoned buildings or to camp in the woods. Unsheltered parents are often reluctant to self-identify as homeless for fear of losing their children.



*Families unable to stay together in shelters often remain on the street*





*In rural areas, an increasing number of homeless individuals live off the grid without basic services such as electricity, running water or sewer service. Such substandard housing is defined as homeless by the federal government.*

*“For every one of us  
(unsheltered homeless)  
that you count, there are  
three more that you miss  
(who avoid the census)  
because we don’t want our  
camps to be cleared out and  
lose all our stuff.”*

*- Unsheltered Homeless Person*

#### **4. Undercount of Rural Homeless People**

In spite of increased efforts, the County Homeless Census continues to under-count people who meet the definition of homeless in rural areas. Rural officials estimate there are a significant number of people living in substandard housing (lacking in heating, cooking or sanitation facilities) that would meet the definition of homeless.

Many rural homeless people tend to exist “off the grid” of homeless services, often because fewer services exist in rural areas, which makes it more difficult to find them. Methodologies used in urban areas – such as using homeless outreach events or field census teams – are less effective in areas with scattered site camp locations.

## SOURCE 1: EXAMINING THE NUMBERS

Following is a series of charts presented with background information that provide a deeper look into the results of the 2012 Homeless Census, including the causes of homelessness, the ages of homeless people, disabilities they face, and other information.

### Scope of the Data

The following information represents the results of the 2012 Homeless Census, primarily focusing on a count of homeless people that meets the state definition of homelessness.

Additionally, this report presents some charts and information on people living with friends or families and people in jail or medical facilities who will be released to

homelessness. Although these homeless people do not meet the state definition of homelessness, they clearly present a significant impact on local services and the community at large.

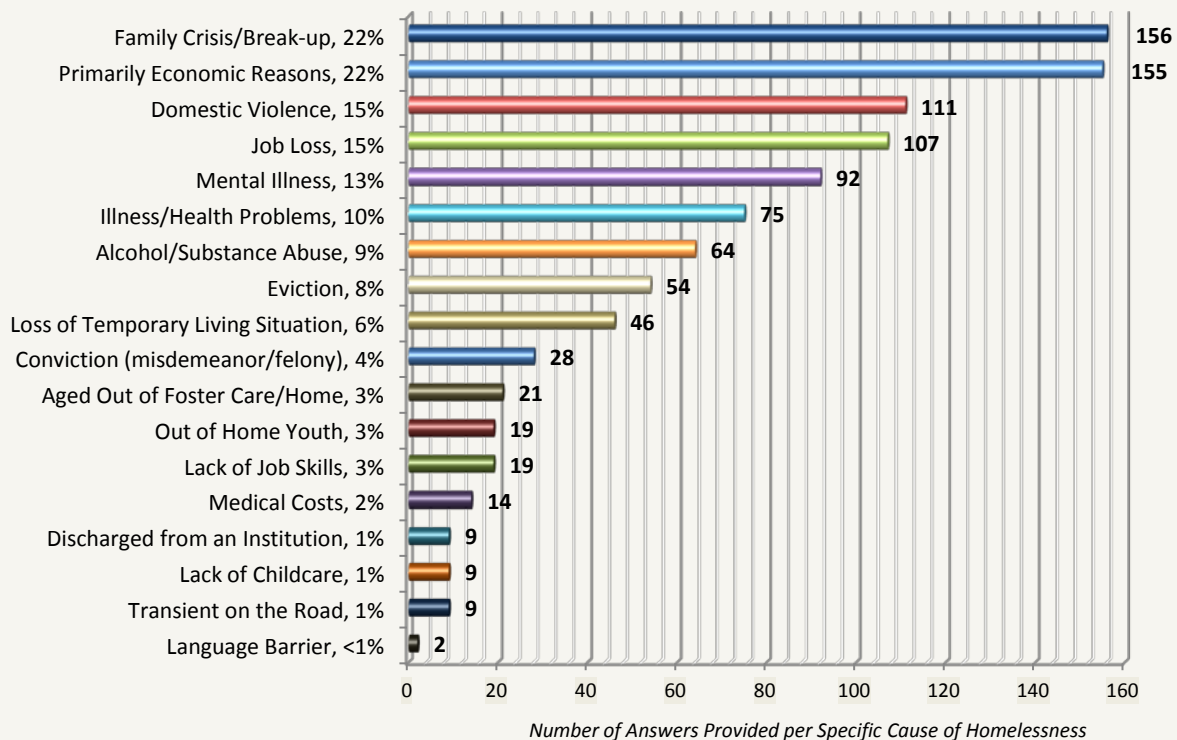
Please note that due to technical constraints with the state's database, some of the totals and subtotals are off by five (5) or less.

### Causes of Homelessness

Understanding the causes of homelessness is key to identifying the most appropriate resources. The chart below presents the self-reported causes of homelessness by respondents in the county census. Each respondent was asked to report all situations that applied, recognizing that causes of homelessness often have a multiplier effect.

#### Causes of Homelessness

*Note: Multiple Answers from 718 Respondents*



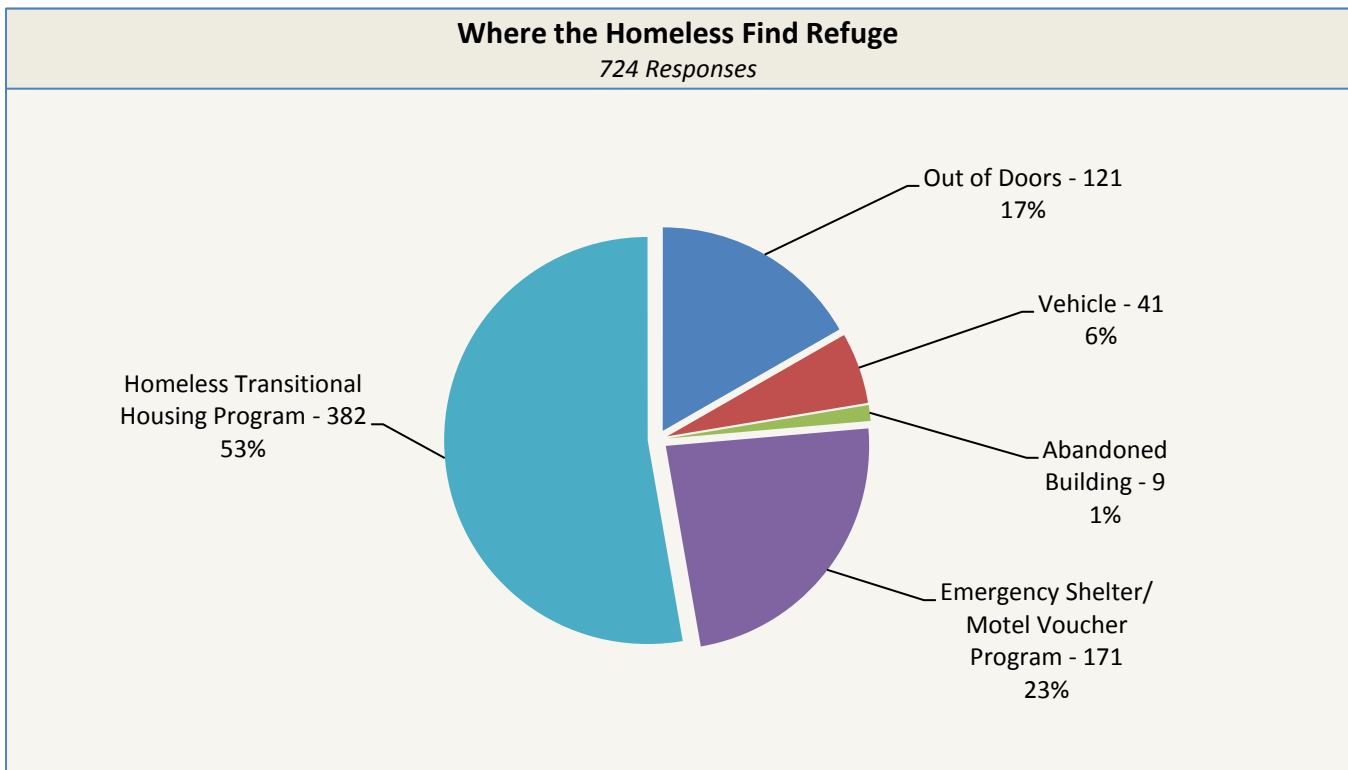
The largest reported cause of homelessness was economic hardship, as reported by 335 or 47% of the total 718 respondents. This includes those respondents reporting “Primarily Economic Reasons,” “Job Loss,” “Eviction,” and “Lack of Job Skills” (see the graph on page 8).

Domestic Violence was cited as the cause for 111 or 15% of respondents. Only 92 or 13% of the respondents cited mental illness as the cause of their homelessness. However, this statistic may be problematic given the conflicting directives of State Commerce to collect names of all respondents and the federal HIPAA law (the “Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act” of 1996) that protects the medical privacy of mentally ill people and other respondents with medical conditions covered by HIPAA. In general, service providers are prohibited from releasing medical information with the names of their clients. On a different question regarding self-reported disabilities, 153, or 21%, self-disclosed mental illness, which may have been a contributing factor in their homelessness. This change may reflect the conversion of 50 households previously considered to be homeless due their residency in transitional housing who are now in permanent housing with social services.

## Where the Homeless Find Refuge

To be included in this homeless census, the respondent had to meet the definition for homelessness (see “Definition of Homeless” on page 5) on the night of January 29, 2012, when the census was conducted. The results present a snapshot of where the homeless take shelter, which includes a broad array of formal and informal accommodations.

The following graph represents the range of those answers. Nearly one quarter of all homeless people reported as shelter residents or 171 people or 23% of 724 respondents. Another 24% of all local homeless or 171 people spent the night unsheltered, with 121 of the people living out of doors, 41 people living in vehicles and nine living in abandoned buildings. Another 382 people, or 53% of all homeless households, were living in transitional housing, defined as housing that is designed to facilitate the movement of homeless individuals or families to permanent housing within a reasonable amount of time, usually 24 months or less. This reflects a change of what the HOME Consortium funds, favoring rental vouchers over new construction of housing.



## Other People without Homes

Beyond the HUD-defined number of homeless people, the census also collected information on individuals who “lack a fixed, regular and adequate nighttime residence” (HUD definition).

This included 122 people in jail and 50 people in medical facilities who will be released to homelessness. It also includes 156 people temporarily staying with friends or families.

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*“Right now, with all the foreclosures leaving empty apartments and houses across the nation there are 5 empty houses for every homeless person. I saw that on the website at the National Alliance to End Homelessness.” - Participant of the Homeless Advocates Focus Group*

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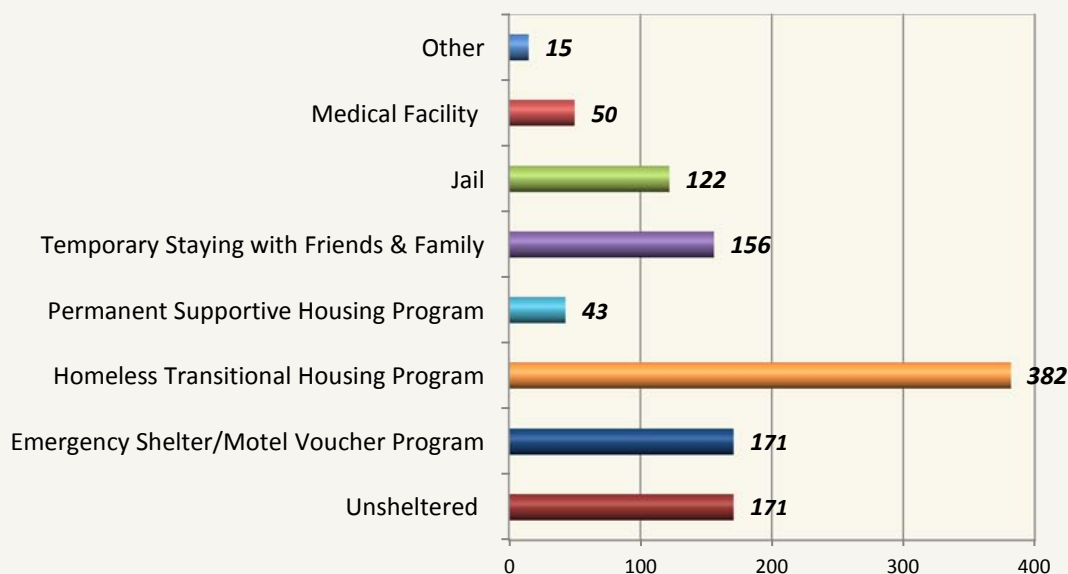
While these numbers are not included in the state-defined total of 724 (page 2 of the 2006 – 2012 County PIT), these homeless people typically have a significant impact on local services such as food banks, soup kitchens and other services. Among this number of “other homeless people” are the unaccompanied minors who are not living with parents or guardians.

These youth typically cycle from staying with friends, sometimes termed “couch surfing,” and living on the streets. One significant challenge in providing shelter for unaccompanied minors is that many avoid going into “the system” for fear of being returned to their parents or guardians as a result of Washington State’s “Becca Laws”, which are intended to keep families together.

While these categories of homelessness do not meet the state definition, the chart above on “Causes of Homelessness” shows that 46 people, or 6%, became homeless after losing a temporary living situation; 28 people, or 4%, lost their homes because of criminal convictions; and 9, or 1%, were discharged from a medical institution. Clearly, these figures will have a direct impact on the local population of homeless people.

### Where Those Without Homes Stayed

1,110 Responses



## Current City

Another element of the Homeless Census provides some contrast of where the homeless spent the night on January 29<sup>th</sup> and where their last permanent address was. Of 575 total respondents, the vast majority – 518, or 90%, spent the night somewhere in Olympia. An additional 23, or 4%, spent the 29<sup>th</sup> in Lacey.

*“I inherited homelessness at 15... we were living in Tenino, but the lack of services made us come to Olympia. Intercity Transit should discount their rates so that homeless people can travel to services. Then they can stay in the places they call home.”*

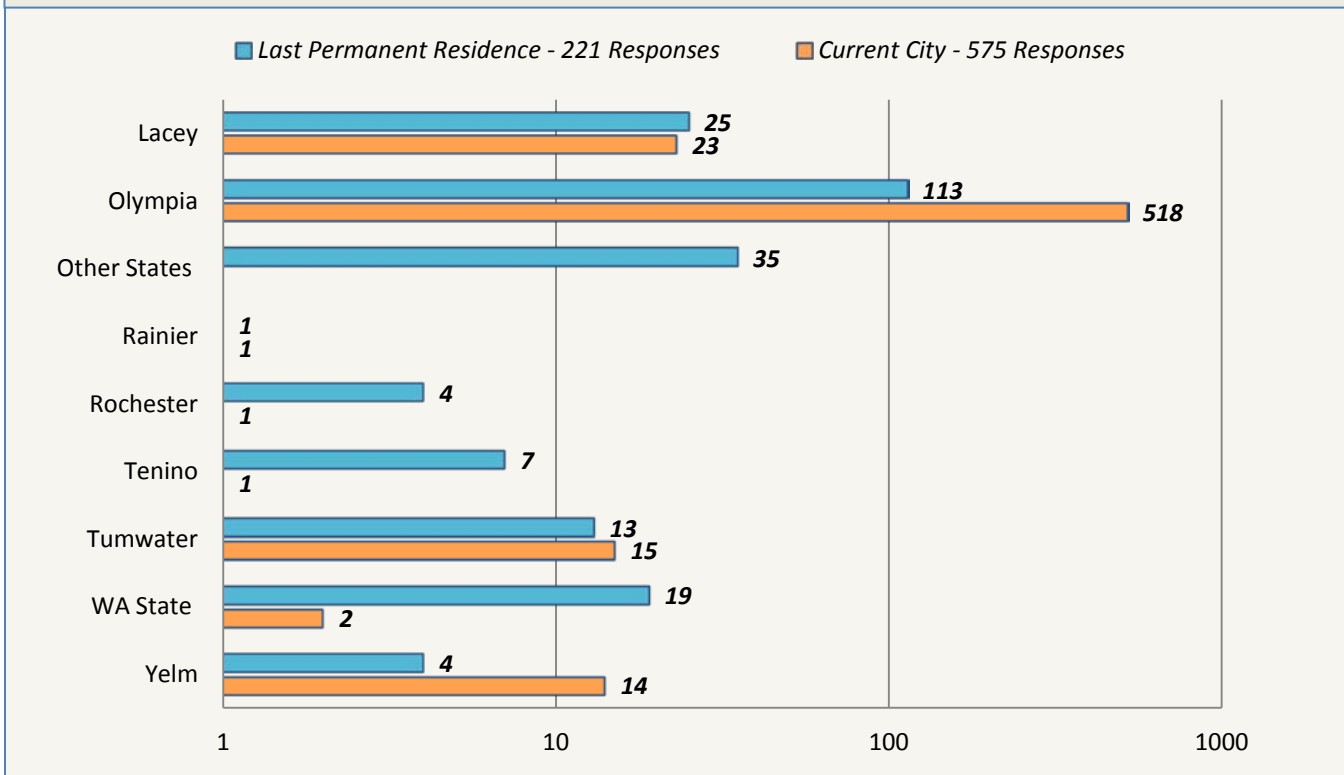
## Last Permanent Residence

A very different geography is presented by the answers of where the respondents had their last permanent residence, meaning a home with an address. Only 113, or 51%, of the total 221 respondents stated that Olympia was the location of their last permanent residence. Another 38, or 17%, stated that they had lived in Lacey (25 or 11%) or in Tumwater (13 or 6%). Only 16, or 7%, said they were from rural Thurston County (one from Rainier, 4 from Rochester, 7 from Tenino, and 4 from Yelm). A total of 35, or 16%, said they were from other states.

The following combined chart shows how limited choices in rural areas can drive homeless people into the urban core. In a dynamic repeated across the country, homeless people from small towns and rural areas are forced to migrate to areas with higher concentrations of services, shelter and transitional housing. Once there, homeless people can feel like displaced persons, unable to rebuild community bonds or to tap neighborhood resources.

**Last Permanent City versus Current City**

796 Responses



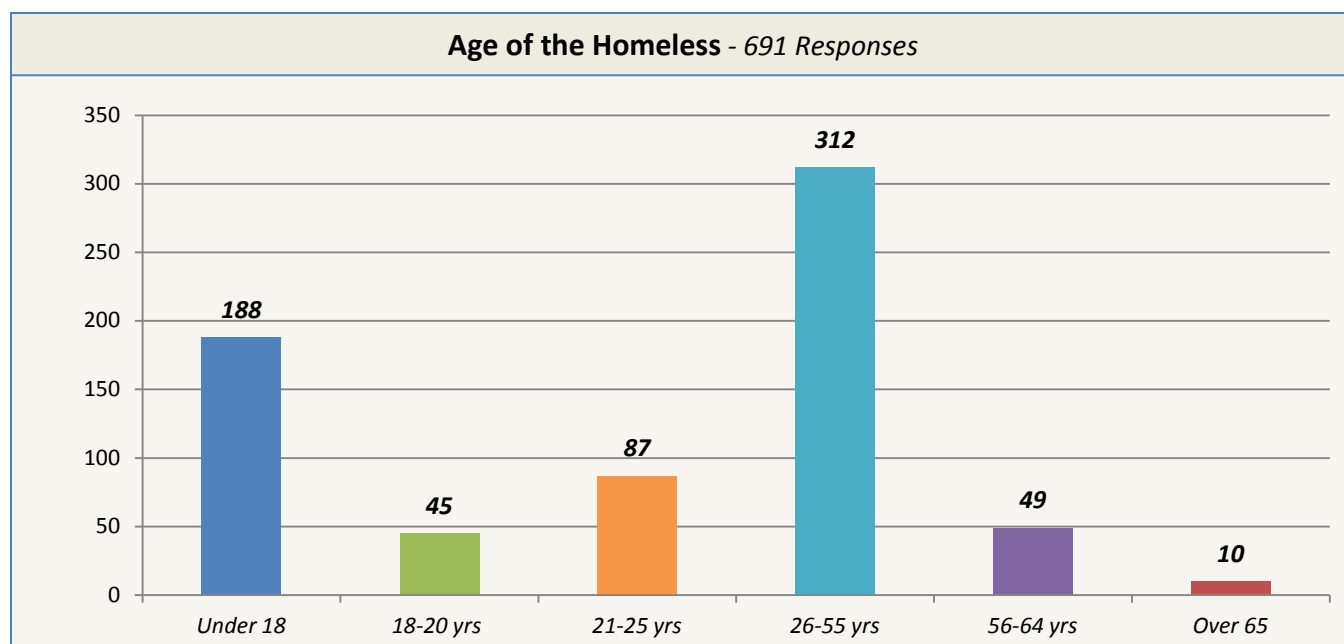
## Population Growth and Increased Homelessness

Homelessness occurs within the context of population growth, with the potential of correlation between the population growth and the increase of homelessness. However, the table below shows that the county's population has grown 13% since 2006 (population data from trpc.org), while homelessness has increased by 64%. While some of the increase in homeless residents is related to population growth, clearly the doubling of homelessness in Thurston County cannot be attributed to the gradual increase of the general population.

Population Growth and Increased Homelessness				
Year	County Population (estimated)	% Increase from 2006	# of Homeless	% Increase from 2006
2006	231,100	---	441	---
2007	238,000	3%	579	31%
2008	245,181	6%	462	5%
2009	249,800	8%	745	69%
2010	252,264	9%	976	121%
2011	254,100	10%	566	28%
2012	Update 6/30/12	Unknown	724	64%

## Age of the Homeless

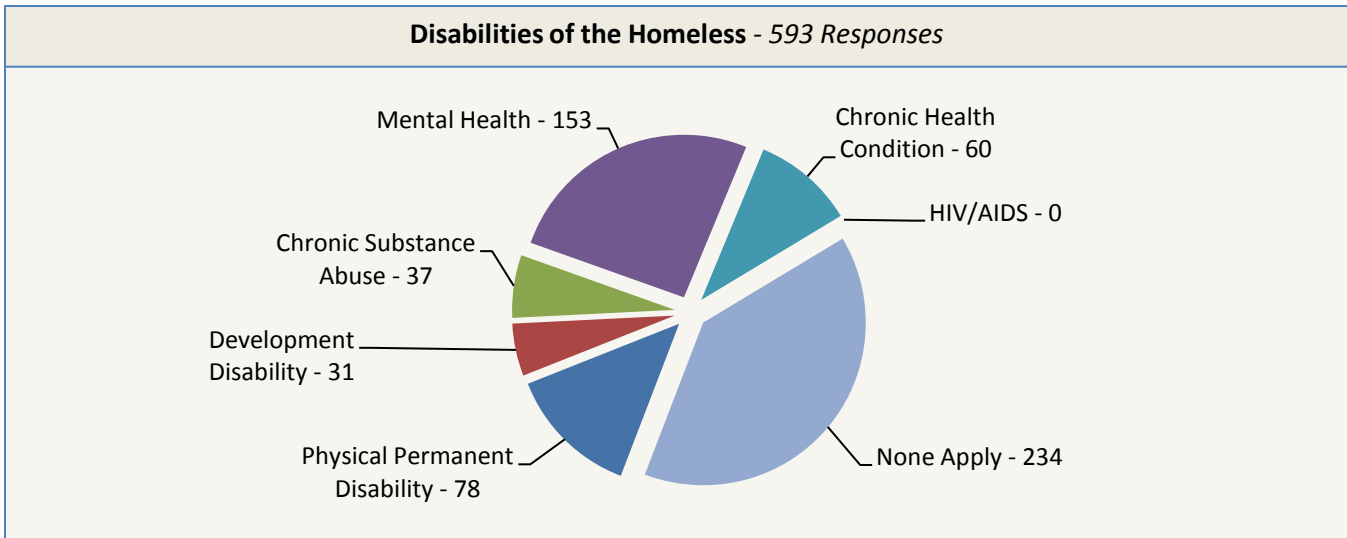
The chart below presents the age spread of homeless people, with the largest number of respondents, 312, or 45%, falling between the ages of 26 to 55 years old. The elderly account for only 1% or 10 of the local homeless population. This chart also shows that 188, or 27%, of all homeless people are children 17 years old or younger. Together with those respondents who are between 18 to 20 years old, 233, or 34%, of the homeless are under 21 years of age. The school census data presented on page 23 (**2006-2012 School Year Homeless Counts**) shows that this number has nearly doubled in the past seven years.





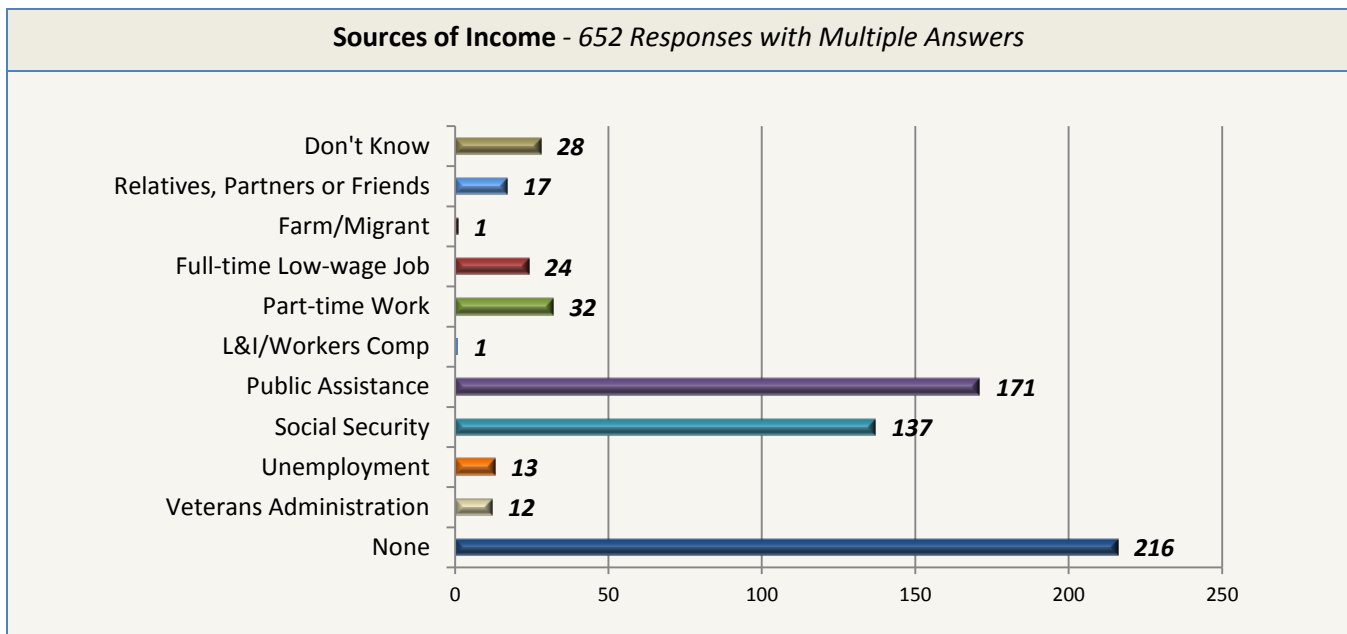
## Disabilities of the Homeless

This chart presents the range of self-reported disabilities affecting local homeless people, showing that mental health impacts 153 people, or 21%, nearly half of the local homeless population that were counted. Another 78 people, or 11%, reported a permanent physical disability. Only 37, or 5%, of respondents reported a drug or alcohol dependency, a 77% decrease since 2010. This suggests either a serious undercount of homeless people with drug or alcohol dependency or a widespread reluctance to self-identify as having drug or alcohol dependency.



## Sources of Income for Homeless People

The majority of the homeless, 30%, or 216 respondents out of 717, reported they had no income. Twenty-four percent, or 171 respondents, reported generic “Public Assistance” as their source of income. The third largest group was 137, or 19%, who rely on Social Security. The remainder reported a variety of income sources: 32 people, or 4%, reported part-time work and 24, or 3%, reported low-wage jobs. A significant number of Thurston County’s homeless people did not want to discuss their income with strangers; 144 people refused to answer questions about the source of their income. The chart below presents the breakdown of sources of income.

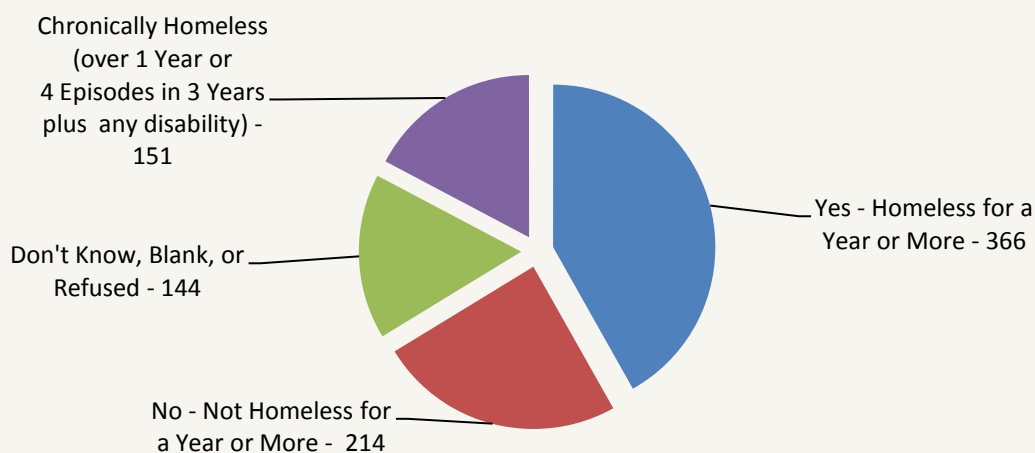


## How Long Have They Been Homeless?

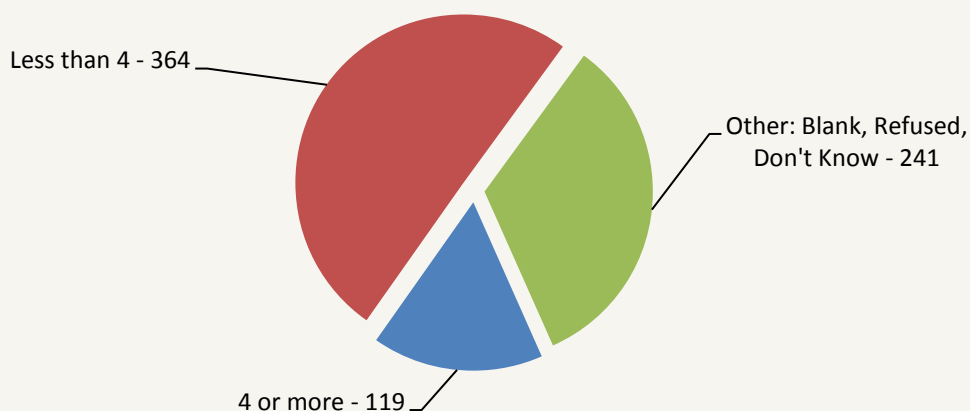
People are staying homeless longer. One of the questions included in the census asked how long people were homeless. Well over half of the respondents, or 366 (63%), said they had been homeless for more than a year, which is one qualifier for being chronically homeless.

Another 214 or 37% reported they had experienced four or more episodes of homelessness in the past three years, which is the other indicator of chronic homelessness. Less than one-third, or 182 (30%), said they had been homeless for less than a year. It appears that the recession is making it harder for people to get back into housing.

**Periods of Homelessness - 875 Responses**



**Episodes of Homelessness in Past Three Years - 724 Responses**



## Who are the Unsheltered?

The Homeless Census found 171 people who were unsheltered, meaning that they had spent the night in a vehicle, a tent, an abandoned building or some other location that was out of doors. Of this total, 114 or 67% were male, 40 or 23% were female and 16 people refused to give their gender. These statistics suggest the percentages of need among the unsheltered populations, showing that we need three additional shelter beds for males to every additional shelter bed for females.

While there appears to be only one self-reported transgendered homeless person, anecdotal reports suggest there may be more, perhaps among the 16 people who refused to respond to the question. While transgendered people are protected by the state against discrimination in housing, the State Human Rights Commission does not have clear jurisdiction in homeless shelters. This means that some local shelters can and do discriminate against transgendered homeless people, although the reasons stated by the Salvation Army are that staff cannot assure the safety of transgendered shelter residents in a dormitory setting.

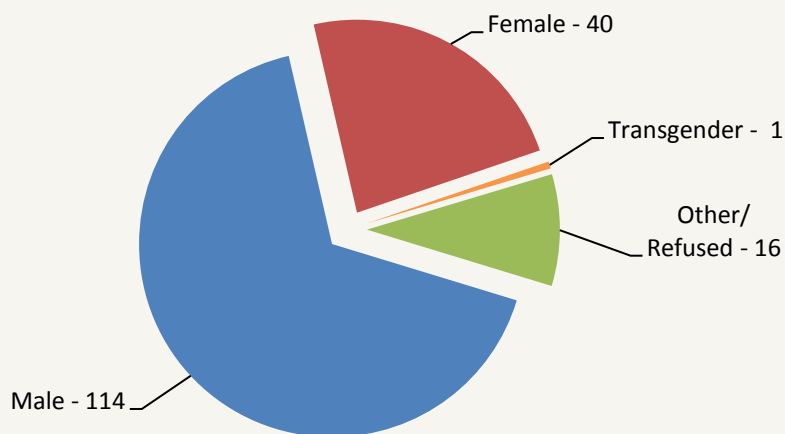
*“Some people worry about homeless people on the sidewalks during the day.*

*The real problem is at 2 AM – that’s when the only (unsheltered homeless) people on the streets are homeless youth, mentally ill single women and sexual predators (3 of the main demographics of the unsheltered).*

*And there’s no one out there to help us.” - Participant of Capital Clubhouse Focus Group*

### Who are the Unsheltered

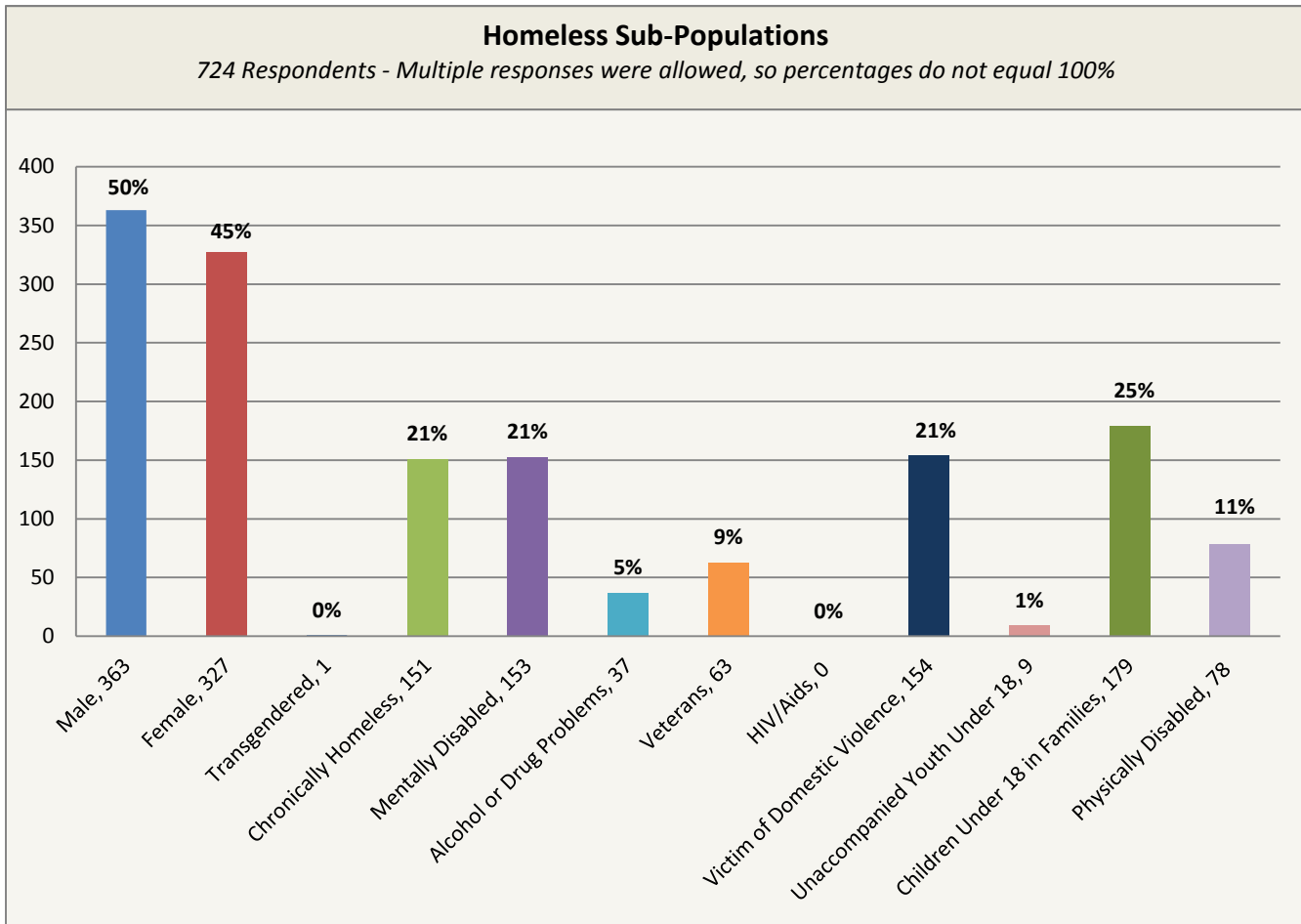
171 Responses - by Gender



# WHO ARE THE HOMELESS?

The pathways to homelessness come from many directions. This results in a broad range of sub-populations of the homeless. Because most service and shelter programs are tailored to meet the unique needs of these specific sub-populations, it is essential to understand the diverse characteristics of homeless people as individuals in order to develop successful responses.

The chart below breaks out some of these distinct sub-populations.



Following is a brief overview of some of these unique characteristics of the primary sub-groups of homeless people. Included is a short description of the current best practice standards for responding to their needs.

## Mental Illness and Homelessness

Mental illness is typically among the top three causes of homelessness, according to the National Coalition for the Homeless. Severe mental illness often impedes the ability to maintain employment or to manage expenses, which in turn makes it difficult to maintain stable housing. Once homeless, people with mental illnesses can find it difficult to understand or cooperate with the rules of emergency shelters. Those who are unsheltered and mentally ill may find it difficult to access services that would help them to stabilize.

In Thurston County, the numbers of the mentally disabled have decreased from a high of 407 or 42% in 2010 to a 2012 low of 153 or 21%. This decrease reflects the conversion of 50 units of transitional housing into permanent housing with services for people with mental illness.

Many people who are mentally ill are eligible for some form of benefits related to their mental illness. Chronically mentally ill people tend to have symptom escalation on a cyclical basis, and sometimes hospitalization may be necessary to re-establish stability. Once hospitalized, people may lose their benefits due to non-payment or abandonment. If jailed, mentally ill people may lose their housing subsidies with supportive services. Upon release from incarceration, many mentally ill people must re-establish their housing and service subsidies, a process that can take several weeks. During periods of hospitalization, landlords often evict them for non-payment and dispose of their belongings as abandoned. After several episodes of homelessness, it can be difficult to find a new landlord to accept their rental history.

**Strategic Response:** The primary strategy for chronically mentally ill homeless people is to provide **Permanent Supportive Housing**, or what is often referred to as “service enriched” housing, typically owned and staffed by non-profit organizations. Housing alone, or “**Housing First**” may succeed in helping to establish initial stability, but without immediate and ongoing treatment and services, many mentally ill homeless people will fail to keep their housing.

### Victims of Domestic Violence

According to the “National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty,” domestic violence is one of the leading causes of homelessness for women and children. A 2005 study commissioned by the US Conference of Cities found that domestic violence was the leading cause of homelessness for women and children in half of the cities reporting, including Seattle.

Locally, there were 111 homeless victims of domestic violence in 2012, representing 15% of the total population of homeless respondents. Victims of domestic violence often have fewer options to seek temporary shelter with



*Women and children who are victims of domestic violence have limited shelter options in Thurston County*

friends and family because their abusers would then be able to find them. As a result, they are disproportionately dependent on shelters, typically operated in confidential locations.

Those beds are configured into family rooms rather than being offered in a dormitory style. This means smaller families may occupy rooms without using all the beds, which can appear to be an under-utilization of the capacity. Other homeless shelters and transitional housing facilities will house domestic violence victims. The numbers clearly indicate a significant need for domestic violence shelters as well as training for other shelter providers.

**Strategic Response:** Homeless victims of domestic violence often require a continuum of care response. Initially, they are best served by **domestic violence shelters**, either formal or informal, or through friend networks that can ensure protection from abusers. Many domestic violence

In the Thurston County area, there are only 28 specifically designed violence shelter beds at the SafePlace shelter. This means that **three out of every four victims do not have shelter.**



*Domestic violence shelters provide supportive services that help survivors achieve independence*



shelters seek to expand into providing **service-enriched transitional housing** to provide a secure stepping-stone from shelter to independence. **Housing First** is not always the best option in that it may reveal a survivor's whereabouts to abusers.

### Chronically Homeless

Over one quarter of the homeless are “chronically homeless,” with 151 or 26% who meet the HUD definition as “either (1) an unaccompanied homeless individual with a disabling condition who has been continuously homeless for a year or more, OR (2) an unaccompanied individual with a disabling condition who has had at least four episodes of homelessness in the past three years.” This represents a 47% increase over the 2006 figure of 103 chronically homeless people.



*The chronically homeless tend to be the most visible, and reinforce many of the negative stereotypes about homelessness*

The definition above derives from the recognition that when persistent homelessness is compounded by disabling conditions, it becomes exponentially difficult to overcome homelessness. Typically, people without those disabling conditions are more successful at getting the services, jobs or other support necessary to get back into permanent housing. However, in recent years, the face of persistent homelessness is changing, apparently as a result of the economy.

As shown on the chart on page 14, the number of chronically homeless people has fluctuated between 10% - 36% of the total homeless population in the past seven years.

According to the National Alliance to End Homelessness, chronically homeless people comprise only 10% of the total

homeless population but use nearly half of all available resources. They typically cycle between shelters, hospitals, jails and other facilities. The chronically homeless also tend to be the heaviest consumers of shelter and homeless services along with public services such as emergency medical response and police.

People who are chronically homeless tend to be the most visible, giving rise to many negative stereotypes. A 2006 *New Yorker* article famously chronicled the price of ignoring the chronically homeless with a story about “Million Dollar Murray,” a homeless man in Reno who cost the state of Nevada one million dollars in emergency care and court costs over the course of ten years, averaging \$100,000 per year – costs which would have been cut by half or two thirds using a **Housing First** approach.

**Strategic Response:** As illustrated by the “Million Dollar Murray” article, the **costs** of not housing the chronically homeless does not **benefit** society with a savings of public and other funding. Such a **cost-benefit analysis** approach supports the **Housing First** model as a strategy to stabilize chronically homeless people by getting them into housing first and then providing the essential services. This is a proven way to save other public funds from law enforcement in order to provide more cost-effective case management.

### Veterans

In Thurston County, 63, or 13%, of the homeless, self-identified as veterans. Nationwide, about one-third of the adult homeless population are veterans. According to the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), homeless veterans are predominantly male, with roughly five percent being female.



*Veterans make up about **one-third** of the adult homeless population and 9% of the total population*





*Outreach events are used to connect with homeless vets who are sometimes cautious about government services*

The majority of homeless veterans are single, come from urban areas, and suffer from mental illness, alcohol and/or substance abuse, or other co-occurring disorders. America's homeless veterans have served in World War II, the Korean War, Cold War, Vietnam War, Grenada, Panama, Lebanon, Afghanistan, and Iraq. Nearly half of homeless veterans served during the Vietnam era. Two-thirds served our country for at least three years, and one-third were stationed in a war zone.

Unfortunately, numerous studies show that veterans are the least likely among the homeless sub-populations to be willing to work with government or other institutional services.

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*"My uncle served his country in Korea, but his country failed him when he came back all messed up. Yeah, he did bad things, broke the law, drank all the time. But, he was my uncle and ended up living like a hobo for nearly 5 decades. Vets deserve better." – Anonymous Government Worker*

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**Strategic Response:** The most effective response to homeless veterans is to ensure they are linked to all possible VA benefits that they may be eligible for, including housing, mental health care, drug and alcohol treatment, employment assistance, and other services. This linkage will ensure that a community makes the best use of these distinct revenue streams. Like most homeless sub-populations, veterans benefit from the **Housing First** model followed up with supportive services. For individuals unwilling or unable to cooperate with a government or non-profit housing program, the next best solution is to offer **survival resources**, such as outdoor clothing, camping gear, food and other supplies.

### Homeless Individuals

Homeless individuals typically make up the largest sub-population of homeless people. Locally, the census revealed 406 single adults, comprising 77% of the total 527 respondents. People are considered homeless individuals when they do not have dependent children, are not expecting a child, or do not have other familial obligations that prohibit them from arranging their individual accommodations. Individuals who are not mentally ill, veterans or victims of domestic violence are generally excluded from many forms of public assistance, including housing. As a result, it can be difficult to find resources to serve them. Many chronically homeless individuals are typically in single-person households.



*Many of the chronically homeless are single individuals who may not qualify for housing or other public assistance*

**Strategic Response:** Homeless individuals should be screened to identify their needs and eligibility for potential resources. While homeless individuals benefit from the **Housing First** model, case managers may elect to utilize lighter forms of assistance such as **temporary emergency shelter, shallow rental subsidies, or job referrals** to help stabilize them and facilitate their return to independence. For individuals unable or unwilling to cooperate with a government or non-profit housing program, the next best solution is to offer **survival resources**, such as outdoor clothing, camping gear, food and other supplies.

### Homeless Families



*Families are often homeless for economic reasons – job loss, fewer employment opportunities or their lack of marketable job skills*

The census found 121 total people in homeless families, accounting for 23% of the homeless population. However, there appears to be a much larger number of families without a home of their own who find shelter by living with friends or family members or in their vehicles, thereby eluding the census methodology and being excluded from the census count. Homeless families often cite job loss or the loss of their housing related to the economy as the cause of homelessness.

Many homeless families choose to stay temporarily with other people, in motels, or in their cars in order to keep their families together. Families tend to avoid shelters in order to prevent potentially negative impacts on their children. As a result, many families with children are disproportionately excluded by the current HUD definition of homelessness.

In addition, many homeless families avoid shelters or the streets because parents fear losing their children as the result of potential intervention by child welfare agencies. Families also avoid the forced separation of family

members in order to fit into shelter regulations that are often restrictive about the number and gender configuration of families in their facilities.

**Strategic Response:** Strategies for homeless families include **“Rapid Re-housing”** or quickly dispersed rental assistance to stabilize them. Other responses include emergency shelters specifically for families with separate family suites that preserve family cohesion. Shelter case management should be followed by rental subsidies to allow them to secure housing. It is also important to encourage families to access all potential **school-based resources** for their school age children.

Also useful are informal networks of friends, school-based or faith community ties. These networks are often the first options pursued by homeless families. Any efforts to strengthen informal networks can be highly effective.

### Homeless Youth

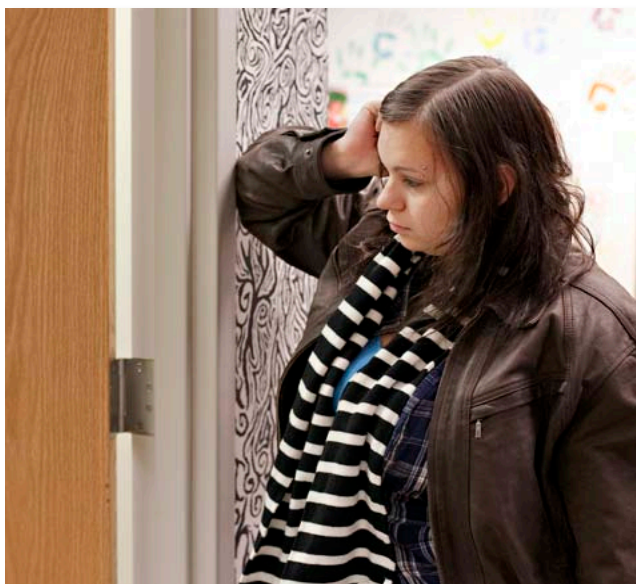


*Homeless youth and young adults do not fit into the adult homeless model; they are migratory, often staying with friends*

There were 188 homeless children who were 17 years of age and under, or 27% of the total 691 respondents. Nine of these children were unaccompanied homeless youth 17 or under in the census, comprising less than 1% of the total population. **(Please note:** this number appears to be significantly lower than the School Census numbers addressed on page 23.) The State Department of Commerce, which administers the statewide Homeless Census, considers youth homeless only when they meet the state definition of “individuals who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence.” The definition includes youth who are living in shelters, transitional housing, out of doors in vehicles or in abandoned buildings. However, a significant number of homeless youth do not fit this definition



but they do fit the federal McKinney Vento definition because they are “migratory” and live temporarily in hotels or motels or with a succession of friends or family. As a result, the School Census presents much higher numbers deriving from a different methodology.



*Without age-appropriate assistance, homeless youth risk falling victim to a cycle of homelessness as adults*

An additional 32 young people ages 18 to 20 and another 41 ages 21 to 25 were part of a category of young homeless people are termed “Transition Aged Youth”, or young people aged 16 through 24. While those under 18 can’t stay in adult shelters, those who are between 18 to 24, are at high risk for victimization when placed in general population emergency shelters. Homeless youth and young adults present a significant challenge to **Housing First** programs in that those under 18 can’t legally sign leases and don’t fit into the adult homeless housing model.

Without appropriately focused interventions, they are likely to become part of the chronically homeless adult population. Adolescents and young adults have different biological, psychological, social, and developmental cognitive needs than adults, and may be more responsive to a structured transitional housing program. Best practice service models are designed to focus on prevention/intervention strategies that are geared to a young person’s developmental stages. These models utilize multiple “best practice” interventions within a harm reduction model, recognizing that one size will not fit all.

**Strategic Response:** Experience and studies show that **Transitional Housing with Supportive Services** is the most effective housing strategy to prevent or overcome

homelessness with youth and young adults. Absent housing resources, the primary service models are **street outreach** and **drop-in centers** that offer survival goods, service referrals, and general case management that emphasizes “harm reduction”.

### Trends in Thurston County Homelessness

Seven years of conducting a Thurston County census of homeless citizens offers a look into the trends of who is homeless in a given year and how that changes over time. The chart on the next page presents seven years of data on who the homeless are, where they were accommodated, and some of the issues they face. The questions that emerge in examining this data include: (1) Who are the homeless; (2) Are we making progress with certain demographics by concentrating services; and, (3) Do we have information to differentiate whether these are the same people year-over-year, or are some people overcoming homelessness while new people are becoming homeless?

The first five years present demographic information that appears to trend upward and then drops off radically by Year 6 in 2011. Some of the fairly static populations include the chronically homeless, who appear to number between 78 and 103 people, with 1 outlier year that revealed 210 chronically homeless in 2007.

Individuals with mental illness trended sharply upwards in the first five years, and again, dropped radically in the sixth year, likely due to a lack of data from mental health service providers. The data on veterans varies radically between a low of 6 veterans in 2007 to a high of 76 veterans in 2008. These radically divergent numbers suggest the need to work more closely with veteran’s assistance organizations to gain the trust of homeless veterans in order to include them in the census.



*Unsheltered homeless people often rely on public accommodations, like park benches, in the absence of day centers*

The significant drop in the number of respondents who self-reported drug and alcohol addiction in the past two years appears incongruent with previous year's data. In 2009 and 2010, there were 164 and 168 respondents with drug and alcohol addiction, dropping to 37 by 2012. Contrary to the experience of street outreach workers, emergency service providers and other public employees' anecdotal reports, this low number seems to obscure the number of people who are chronic inebriates.

Overall, further examination by community partners is needed to understand the meaning of these trends and to better utilize the information provided by the census to tailor more effective programs and services.

<b>Thurston County Census 2006 – 2012: Trends in Demographics of Homelessness</b>							
	<b>2006</b>	<b>2007</b>	<b>2008</b>	<b>2009</b>	<b>2010</b>	<b>2011</b>	<b>2012</b>
<b>Out of Doors</b>	122	187	154-94*	219	363	269	171
<b>Shelters</b>	156	167-132*	118	123	181	141	171
<b>Transitional Housing</b>	163	143	100	203	432	260	382
<b>Subtotals**</b>	<b>441</b>	<b>579</b>	<b>462</b>	<b>745</b>	<b>976</b>	<b>568</b>	<b>724</b>
<b>Jails &amp; Medical Institutions</b>	55	38	17	109	146	98	122
<b>Friends</b>	104	103	150	159	162	74	156
<b>Total</b>	<b>600</b>	<b>720</b>	<b>629</b>	<b>1,013</b>	<b>1,284</b>	<b>740</b>	<b>1,110</b>
Youth - <i>Total Sheltered &amp; Unsheltered (17 &amp; under)</i>	115	111	187	228	420	144	188
Families with Children - <i>Total Sheltered &amp; Unsheltered</i>	151	196	151	275	289	162	121
Single Men & Women - <i>Total Sheltered &amp; Unsheltered</i>	290	383	311	470	663	387	603
Elderly – <i>Total Sheltered &amp; Unsheltered (65 &amp; over)</i>	4	3	11	7	16	3	10
Veterans – <i>Total Sheltered &amp; Unsheltered</i>	75	6	76	18	68	42	63
Mental Illness (self-reported disability)	156	292	288	356	407	249	153
Drug and Alcohol Addicted	122	149	125	164	168	41	37
Chronically Homeless	103	210	84	98	99	78	151

\*Numbers vary between state report and county report for this demographic in these years.

\*\*HUD-defined Homelessness

**Please Note:** The numbers above are drawn from the State Department of Commerce “Point in Time Count” website (<http://www.commerce.wa.gov/site/1064/default.aspx>) and from previous Thurston County Homeless Census Reports, years 2006 – 2010. There are some inconsistencies with some of these numbers as a result of being drawn from different sources.

# SOURCE 2: COUNTY'S PUBLIC SCHOOL CENSUS

## Homeless School Children and the McKinney Act

Thurston County schools are required to count homeless students, kindergarten through 12<sup>th</sup> grade, as part of the McKinney-Vento Act, which declares that homeless school children are also entitled to the protections listed under the section entitled, "Education for Homeless Children and Youths." The Act defines homeless children as "individuals who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence." The act goes on to give examples of children who would fall under this definition:

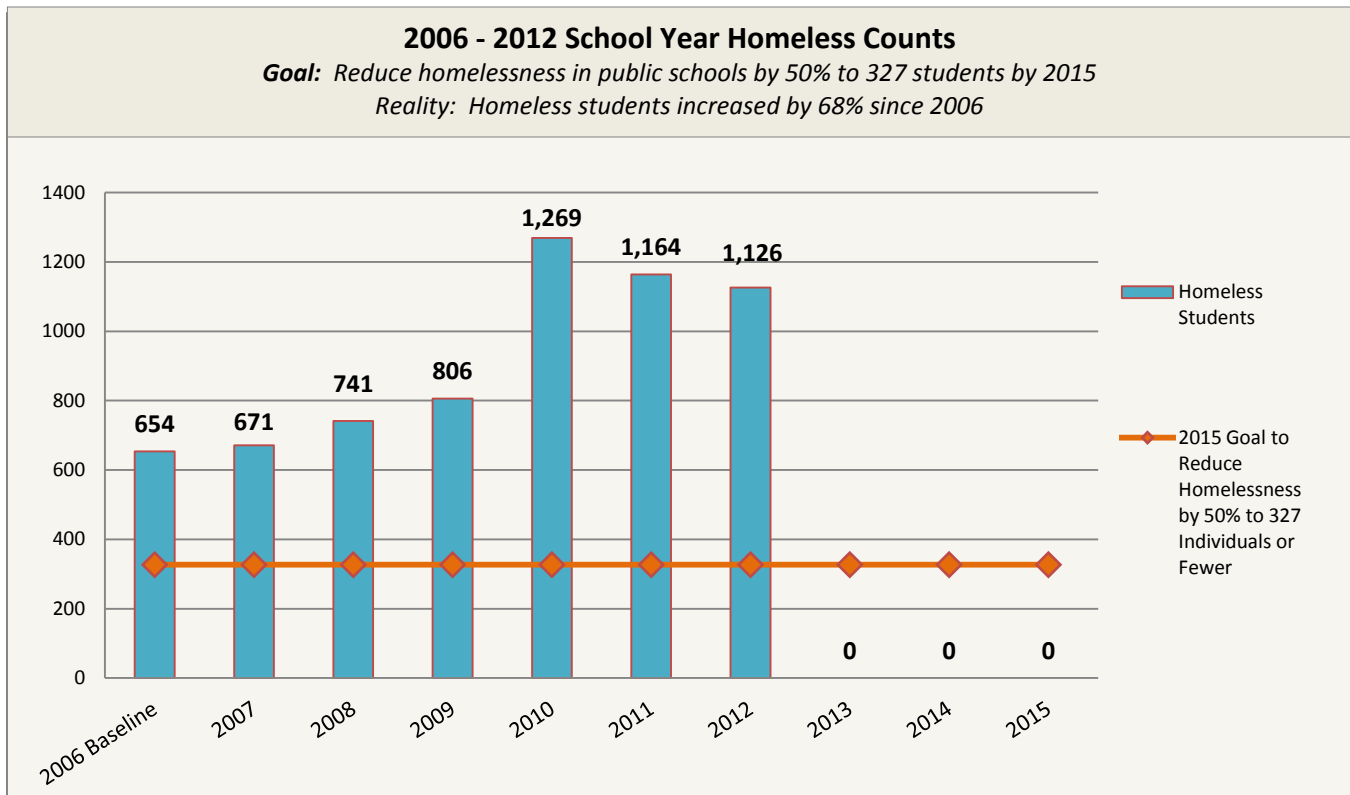
- Children sharing housing due to economic hardship or loss of housing;
- Children living in "motels, hotels, trailer parks, or camp grounds due to lack of alternative accommodations;"
- Children living in "emergency or transitional shelters;"
- Children "awaiting foster care placement;"

- Children whose primary nighttime residence is not ordinarily used as a regular sleeping accommodation (e.g., park benches, etc.);
- Children living in "cars, parks, public spaces, abandoned buildings, substandard housing, bus or train stations . . ."

Each year, the State Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) works with local school districts throughout the state to identify children and youth attending school who are experiencing homelessness. The purpose of this effort is to offer appropriate services to the family, child, or youth and to report the number of homeless students to federal, state, and local governments. This count does not include school-age children who are not attending school.

## Homeless School Children in Thurston County

The chart below shows the year-over-year changes of homeless school children enrolled in the eight school districts of Thurston County. These numbers are produced by the local school districts and reported to the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction.



## Correlation of School District Numbers with County Homeless Census Numbers

While the two sets of numbers come from different sources, they do offer a composite view of homelessness. Together, they mirror a general trend of homelessness in Thurston County rising to an all-time high in 2010 and since then dropping. While the school district numbers decreased by 11%, or 143 students, since a 2010 high of 1,269, the County's Homeless Census numbers dropped radically by 26%, or 253 individuals, since 2010.

The School District homeless student numbers are collected over the prior full school year, in this case, 2010-2011, which ended seven months before the January 2012 census. A further difference is that some of the county's census numbers include homeless students who were counted by the school districts.

Last, the school district's numbers include students who live with friends or family, an accommodation not included in the county numbers. As a result, these figures cannot be directly added together or statistically compared.

The school numbers include only students enrolled during the school year 2010-2011, but do not include their families—particularly absent are other siblings who are not school age. On the other hand, the "Point in Time" homeless census is a one-day snapshot of homelessness in Thurston County, which includes many students staying with their families in shelters, transitional housing, or out of doors. While derived from different methodologies and timelines, these two sets of numbers clearly show that the number of homeless individuals is increasing since the baseline year of 2006.

## Poverty in Public Schools – Other Data

Another useful source of information on poverty among public school age children is the "Free and Reduced Meal" data published by the **State Office of Public Instruction (OSPI)** on an annual basis.

Poverty is clearly an indicator for being at risk of homeless for families with children, so this data provides a useful perspective on how Thurston County schools are doing. Unfortunately, across the board, all seven districts show a deepening of poverty in public schools.

The eligibility of students to participate in the state's free and reduced price school lunch program is determined

by federal income guidelines according to family size and regionally adjusted poverty line of household income.

The "Free and Reduced Meal" program is funded jointly by the federal Department of Agriculture and Washington state public school system to ensure that hunger is not a deterrent to a quality education. All households with income levels below certain amounts are encouraged to apply for any or all of the following programs:

1. National School Lunch Program
2. School Breakfast Program
3. Special Milk Program

This data is included in the OSPI "Report Card", an online database that presents statewide and district level information on K-12 students. The OSPI website also presents other information, including the number of homeless students by district. Please note: as with the homeless student data, this information is collected for school years that straddle a biennium, which falls seven months prior to the Homeless Census.

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*The number and percentage of students who are eligible for free or reduced lunch serves as the single most comprehensive, countywide indicator of poverty status for families with children in public schools.*

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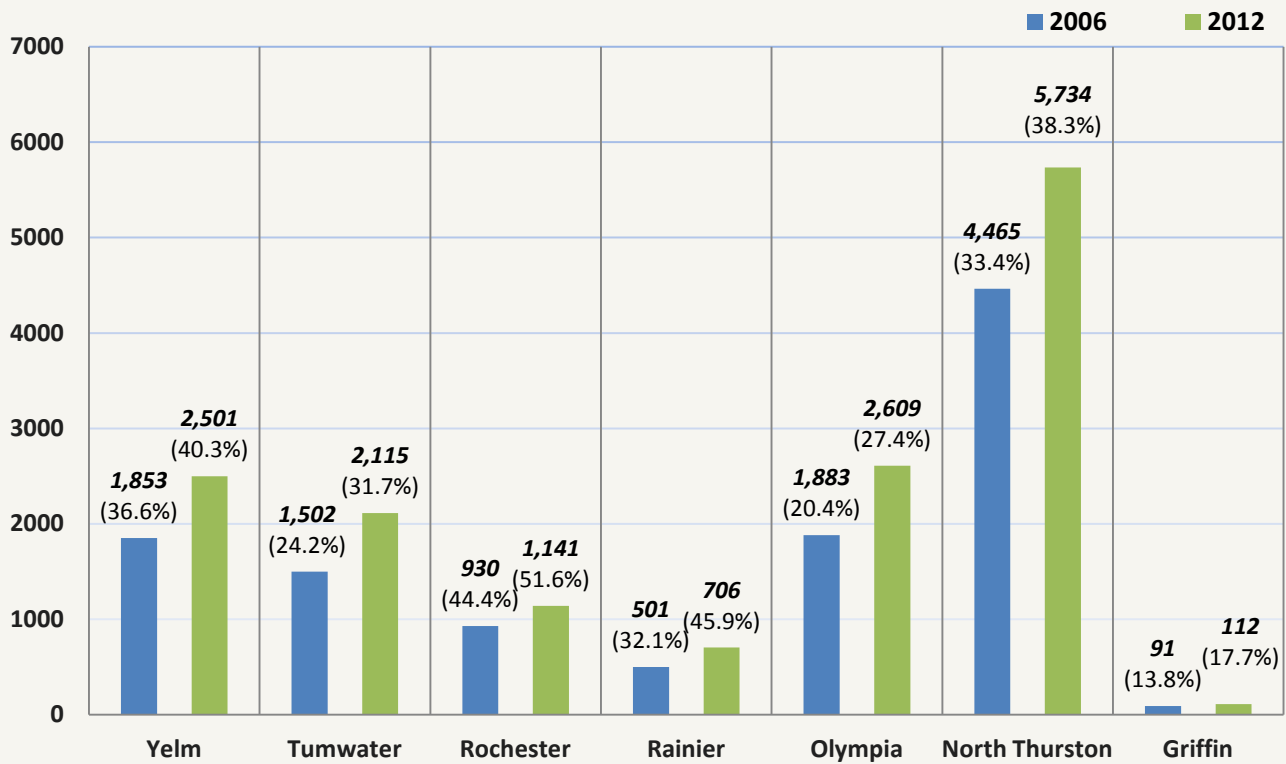
The chart on the following page shows the seven-year change in poverty rates by district for the seven school districts in Thurston County as compared to the Washington statewide average.

The state average went from 36.7% to 43.7% of students in poverty. Local Thurston County school districts varied widely, with Griffin starting at 13.8% and rising to 17.7%. Rochester went from 44.4% to 51.6 percent. The next highest percentages were in Rainer, which went from 32.1% to 45.9%.

While not all families with children who are living at or below the poverty line will become homeless, these families are all at a much higher risk for homelessness.



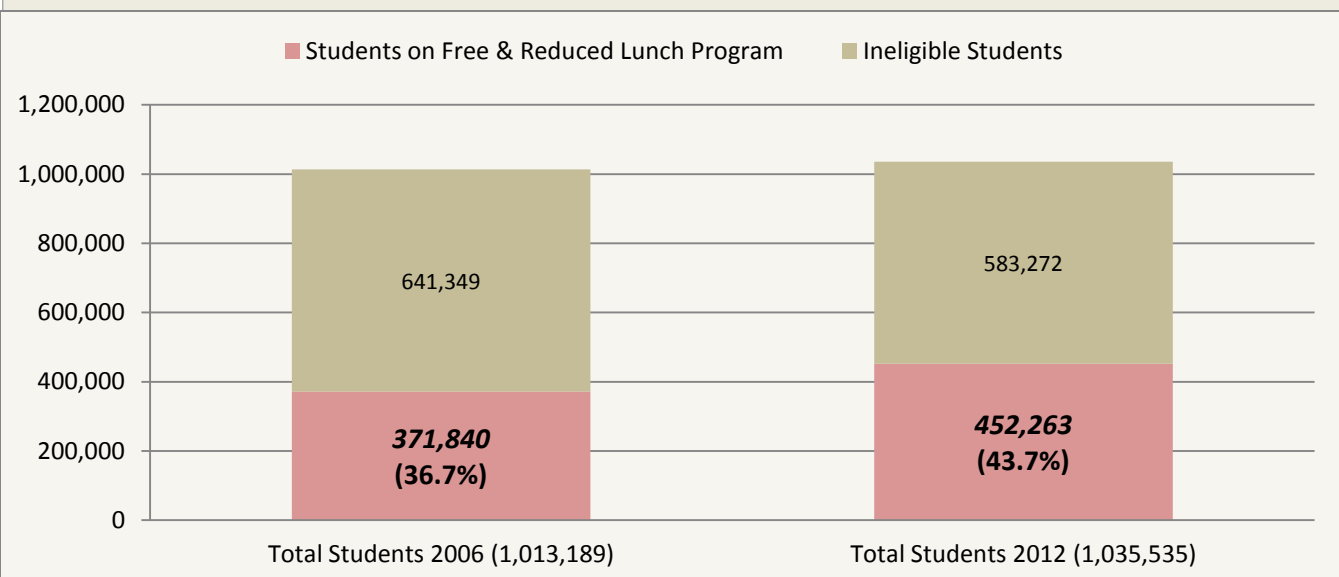
### Annual Count of Students on Free and Reduced Lunch Program



**Note:** Totals in the chart above represent the number of students per district who were on the free and reduced lunch program in 2006 and 2012. The number in parenthesis identifies the percentage that number represents in relation to the total number of students per district in 2006 and 2012.

Statewide, the percentage of students on the free and reduced lunch program increased significantly between 2006 and 2012. In 2006, **371,840** or **(36.7%)** of students were on the program; in 2012, **452,263** or **(43.7%)** of students were.

### Students on Free and Reduced Lunch Program Statewide



# Homelessness in Higher Education (2012): The Evergreen State College

In May 2012, students at the Evergreen State College conducted the second annual survey of homelessness on campus. While separate from the County's Homeless Census, this independent survey offers a snapshot of homelessness within higher education. College administrators, parents, and the public at large are often unaware of the high number of homeless students in post-secondary schools across the United States.

The institution of higher education provides low-income people access to unique resources such as scholarships and student loans, which for many can mean the difference between housing and homelessness. Unfortunately, recent State budget-cuts to education have increased tuition and many students find that financial aid is now insufficient to cover the expense of a college education. Even with grants and loans combined, many full-time students struggle to meet their basic needs, including food and housing. The high rate of unemployment in the current economic recession has led to a shortage of the part-time jobs that historically made college education affordable for low income students. Many people, including recently laid-off workers, are turning to higher education in the hopes of gaining re/entry into the workforce. However, the reduction of financial aid makes college less accessible.



***11% of student respondents reported that they are currently experiencing homelessness.***

**Methodology:** Student researchers with Evergreen's *Civic Intelligence Research & Action Laboratory (CIRAL)* conducted this voluntary response survey over the course of two days via a poll booth in Red Square with a modified version of the County's Homeless Census questionnaire and a ballot box.

***15% of students self-identified as at risk of becoming homeless.***

Of 318 total student respondents, 35 (11%) reported that they are currently homeless; 49 (15.4%) of non-homeless students reported that they have been homeless at some point during their college career, and 15.1% (43/283) of non-homeless student respondents self-identified as at risk of becoming homeless.

A second campus demographic, easily observed but difficult to survey for their fear of persecution, is that of Olympia's greater homeless population. Resources lacking elsewhere, including 24-hour public restrooms, healthy/affordable food, warm/dry welcoming spaces, and a culture of diversity and tolerance, appear to have made the Evergreen State College a de facto resource center for the poor—a role consistent with Evergreen's history of service to the community but, nonetheless, one outside of its official responsibility.

### **Student Research Group Recommendations:**

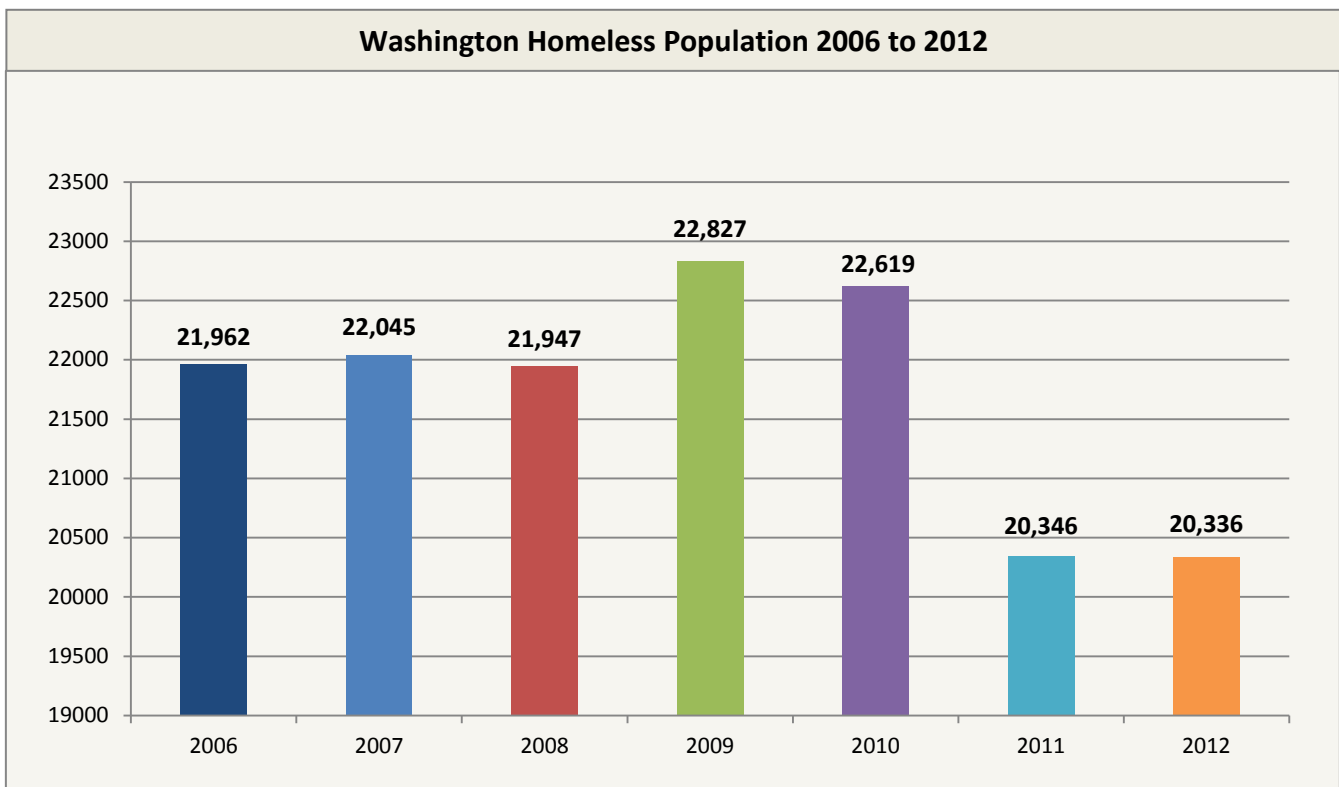
- ✓ Mitigate homelessness by repealing State budget cuts to education.
- ✓ Utilize national best practice alternatives to the criminalization of homelessness.
- ✓ Institutionalize tolerance for the life-sustaining activities of homeless individuals; i.e. sleeping, eating, and other bodily functions.
- ✓ Establish a resource center with 24-hour public restrooms in downtown Olympia.
- ✓ Allocate resources to provide for the basic needs of homeless students; i.e. food, shelter, and medical care.
- ✓ Designate a "Safe-Lot" at Evergreen for car-camping homeless students.
- ✓ Provide a safe camping area for homeless students who live in the thousand-acre Evergreen State College forest.

***Student Research Group: Sally Toussaint, Jess Weiler, Shawn Sanderson, and Alex Daye; Report by Alex Daye.***

# HOMELESSNESS STATEWIDE

## Examining Homelessness across Washington State

Since 2006, homelessness statewide has **decreased by 7.4%** from 21,962 to 20,336. While this is an improvement, it falls far short of the Ten-Year Plan goal to reduce homelessness by **50% or 10,981 by 2015**. Each year, the state has combined the homeless census numbers of all the counties, starting with a total count of 21,962 homeless people in 2006 and dropping almost 8% to 20,346 homeless people counted in 2011. While each county has worked diligently to reduce homelessness, it appears that the total statewide population has remained fairly static, rising and sinking with the high number to date occurring in 2009 with 22,827 people and the 2011 low of 20,346.



## Snapshot of Six Counties - Six Years of Census Results

The following chart presents seven years of homeless census data, 2006 through 2012, from the six most urban counties in Western Washington. What is striking is that two of the counties with the most comprehensive efforts underway to coordinate their homeless services do indeed show significant decreases in their homeless counts since 2006, with Clark County decreasing by 29.8% from 1,391 to 977 and Whatcom County decreasing by 41.2% from 838 to 493.

Conversely, in the same seven-year timeframe, Pierce County shows a 42.8% increase from 1,398 to 1,997 and King County shows a 10.8 % increase from 7,996 to 8,858. Pierce County has only recently undertaken a coordinated point-of-entry system. As of this time, King County still does not have a centralized or singular coordinated access and entry system for shelter and housing services. These two counties also represent the most populous areas with arguably the most extensive service and shelter resources, which may attract some number of homeless people from regions with fewer resources.



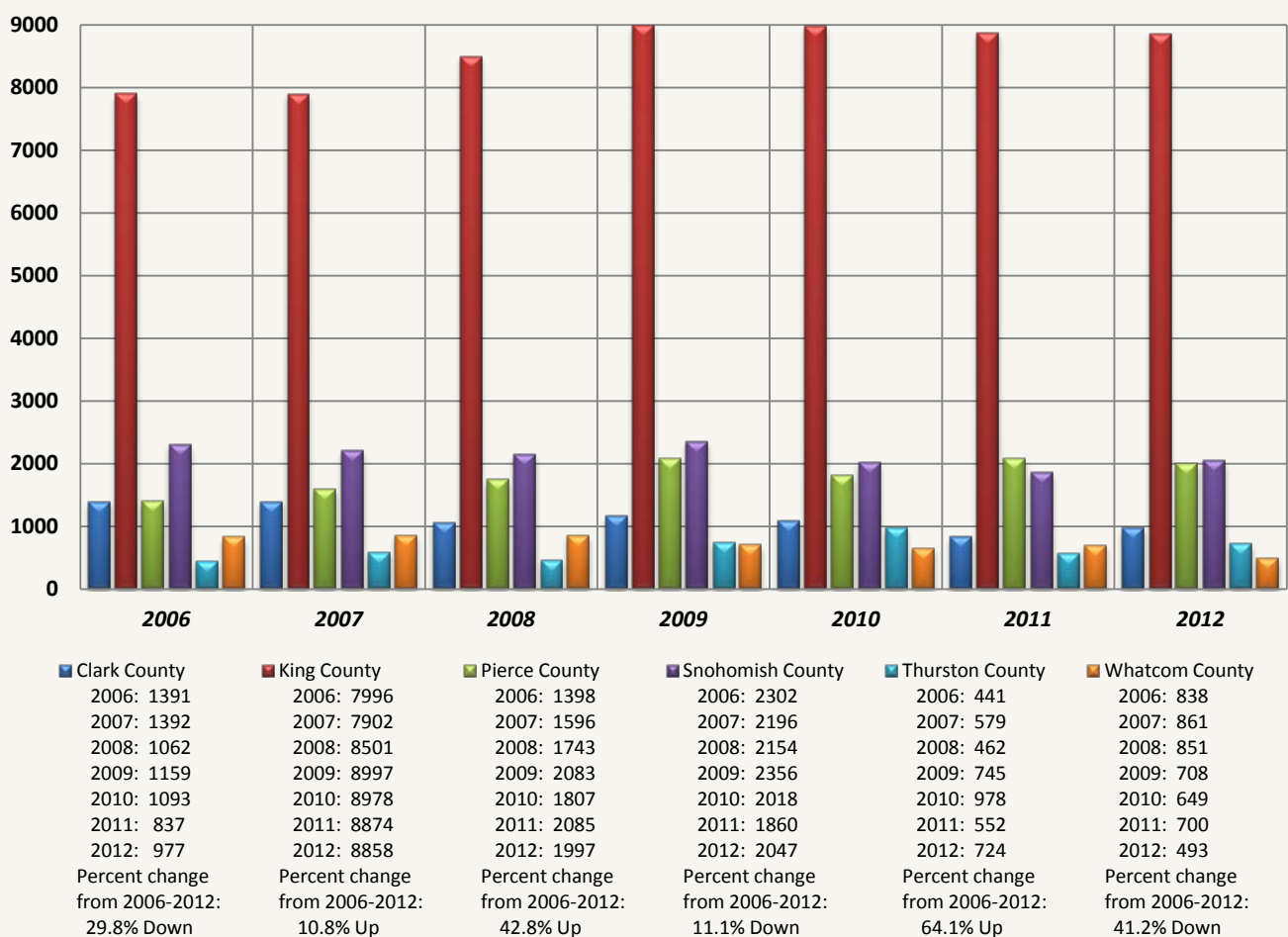
Here in Thurston County, we have decreased from our all time high in 2010, yet we still show a 64.1% increase in homelessness since 2006 from 441 to 724. In mid-2011, Thurston County began a coordinated point of intake for single adults, a new practice that is designed to maximize the utilization of services, shelter and housing resources. In early 2012, the County hired a Homeless Coordinator to analyze and improve the entire homeless resource system. It is expected that both of these innovations will work to reduce homelessness locally.

Without a comprehensive analysis of all contributing factors, it is difficult to understand these population shifts. The proximity of these six urban counties does present the opportunity for migration toward areas that may offer more comprehensive services, or simply presents a more welcoming environment.

Interns working on this census report queried the other five counties to learn what caused the decreases and learned anecdotally that camp clearances and other enforcement actions may have contributed to some of the decreases.

Further examination of these trends may reveal that the effects of anti-homeless enforcement actions have a significant impact on census numbers along with effective homeless coordination programs.

**2006 – 2012 Point in Time Census in Six Western Washington Counties**





# EXAMINING THE RESOURCES

## Thurston County Shelter and Homeless Housing Capacity

An essential key to reducing homelessness is to maximize the use of all shelter and housing resources, and to ensure the appropriate shelter and housing resources are matched to the needs of the individuals. In addition, shelter and housing must be supplemented with supportive services to help stabilize people and support them in becoming more independent.

The chart entitled, “**Shelter & Transitional Housing Capacities**” on the following page provides an overview of the current capacities and occupancy rates of our existing network of shelter and housing in Thurston County.

This lost capacity is the result of budget cuts affecting transitional housing capacity at the Housing Authority (56 beds lost), Community Youth Services (6 beds lost) and Salvation Army (6 beds lost) and of conversion of some transitional housing beds to become permanent housing at Behavioral Health Resources (conversion of 52 beds).

*This chart shows a net loss of 100 beds in Thurston County’s capacity to accommodate homeless families and individuals since 2011.*

Best practices indicate there are some populations of homeless people who will always need supportive housing in some form, particularly for people with mental illness. The model of transitional housing only works for people who benefit from case management and service referrals that strengthen their independent living skills

These lost transitional housing beds were off-set by a net gain of nine (9) shelter beds, including additional beds at the Yelm Community Service Center (one bed gained) two more beds added to the St. Michaels/Sacred Heart Church cold weather shelter (2 beds gained) and the Family Support Center shelter at Olympia’s First Christian Church (6 beds gained).

**Please note:** this chart on the next page presents shelter and housing resources are grouped by type (i.e., emergency shelters or transitional housing); the demographics served (i.e., single men vs. families with children); the bed capacities and the household capacities. This distinction is important because the number of available beds may be configured as dormitory style or as family rooms, which means that a family of four might occupy a six-bed family room and therefore fill that room to capacity even though two beds remain open.



*Transitional Housing provides families with the time and opportunity to develop a more economically stable and, therefore, healthier household*

THURSTON COUNTY 2012 SHELTER & TRANSITIONAL HOUSING CAPACITIES		
<b>*Emergency Shelter Capacity (up to 90-days stay)</b>		
<b>Individuals – Men</b>	<b>Beds</b>	<b>Households</b>
Salvation Army – Men	42	42
<b>Salvation Army – Men (Cold Weather)</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>Saint Michael's/Sacred Heart (Cold Weather Shelter) (Increased by 2 from 2012)</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>12</b>
Drexel House	16	16
<b>Individuals – Women</b>	<b>Beds</b>	<b>Households</b>
Salvation Army	16	16
<b>Families with Children</b>	<b>Beds</b>	<b>Households</b>
Housing Authority of Thurston County	16	4
SafePlace	28	10
Yelm Community Services (Increased by 1 from 2012)	6	1
Tenino – Episcopal Church – Hope House	3	1
<b>Emergency Shelter Network – Interfaith Works (Cold Weather Shelter)</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>18</b>
Family Support Center - 1st Christian Church	24	7
Emergency Shelter Network - Out of the Woods	12	3
<b>Youth</b>	<b>Beds</b>	<b>Households</b>
Community Youth Services - Haven House	10	10
<b>Totals: INCLUDING Cold Weather Capacity</b>	<b>228</b>	<b>163</b>
<b>Totals: EXCLUDING Cold Weather Capacity</b>	<b>173</b>	<b>110</b>
<b>**TRANSITIONAL CAPACITY (Up to Two Years Stay)</b>		
<b>Individuals- Men &amp; Women</b>	<b>Beds</b>	<b>Households</b>
Bread & Roses - Duplex	12	12
Olympia Union Gospel Mission - Men in Recovery	7	7
Olympia Union Gospel Mission - Women in Recovery	3	3
Behavioral Health Resources - TBRA (reduced by 52 from 2012)	8	40
LIHI Arbor Manor - Women's transitional beds	5	5
LIHI – Fleetwood Veterans Transitional Units	11	
Drexel House - Single Men and Women	26	26
<b>Families with Children</b>	<b>Beds</b>	<b>Households</b>
Housing Authority of Thurston County (reduced by 52 from 2012)	120	44
Olympia Union Gospel Mission	13	4
<b>Youth</b>	<b>Beds</b>	<b>Households</b>
Community Youth Services (reduced by 6 from 2012)	58	34
<b>Totals</b>	<b>263</b>	<b>181</b>
<b>TOTAL THURSTON COUNTY CAPACITY</b>		
	<b>Beds</b>	<b>Households</b>
<b>Emergency Shelter</b>	173	
Cold Weather Additional Emergency Shelter Beds	55	138
<b>Transitional</b>	263	181
<b>Totals</b>	<b>436 – Warm Weather 491 – Cold Weather</b>	<b>433</b>

\*Gained 3 emergency shelter beds since 2012: +2 beds in St. Michael's Cold Weather Shelter; +1 bed in Yelm Community Center Shelter

\*\* Lost 120 Transitional Housing beds since 2012: <6> from Salvation Army; <52> from BHR (52 beds shifted to permanent supportive housing; <56> from HATC; <6> from CYS. Gains: +11 transitional veterans beds at Fleetwood

## Shelter & Housing Capacity Changes



*Cold weather overflow shelter provides critically needed emergency shelter, typically using faith community buildings (churches, temples) and floor mats*

In 2012, Thurston County gained one more shelter bed for a new total of 173 year-round shelter beds. The cold weather overflow capacity added three new beds for a new total of 55 cold weather beds, bringing the cold weather capacity to a new total of 228 shelter beds.

Unfortunately, the County lost approximately 81 designated transitional housing beds (maintained by nonprofit agencies) due to conversion (several agencies converted transitional beds to permanent housing with services) and due to budget cuts. However, these beds were replaced because of new HOME Consortium priorities that provided funding for an additional 119 individuals' assisted transitional housing vouchers.

**Ratio of Occupancy to Capacities of Shelter and Homeless Housing**

Census Information	Date Census Completed	Number of Homeless People	Countywide Capacity	Percentage of Capacity to Meet Needs for Shelter
<b>2006 Census</b>	January 26, 2006	441	393*	89%
<b>2007 Census</b>	January 25, 2007	579	351**	61%
<b>2008 Census</b>	January 24, 2008	462	445***	58%
<b>2009 Census</b>	January 29, 2009	745	431	51%
<b>2010 Census</b>	January 28, 2010	976	544	56%
<b>2011 Census</b>	January 27, 2011	566	544	96%
<b>2012 Census</b>	January 29, 2012	724	436	60%

\*Old Devoe Road Street shelter in operation    \*\*Old Devoe Road Shelter shut down

\*\*\*Drexel House and Tumwater Gardens opened, significant expansion of TBRA (Tenant-based Rental Assistance)

According to the chart above, Thurston County **did not have the capacity** to accommodate 100% of our homeless residents. In particular, there were 171 occupants of the 228 existing shelter beds with another 171 unsheltered people living out of doors.

While the available capacity could be better utilized, there are one and a half homeless people for every available shelter and transitional housing bed.

There are one and a half homeless people for every available shelter and transitional housing bed.

## Percentage of Unsheltered People

The 2012 census results showed that **171, or 24%, of the homeless were unsheltered**, seeking shelter out of doors, in vehicles, or in abandoned or substandard buildings.

In terms of percentage of the total homeless population, this percentage has fluctuated between 24% in 2012 to a high point of 37% in 2010. The 48% unsheltered in 2011 seems to be the result of census validity issues that were addressed in the 2011 report. According to the chart above, Thurston County **did not have the capacity** to accommodate 100% of our homeless residents - with 171 people in the existing 228 shelter beds and another 171 unsheltered people living out of doors. Yet, as the chart below shows, nearly one quarter of the homeless people identified in the 2012 census reported they were unsheltered.



*Many homeless people and families take refuge in abandoned, substandard buildings*

Unsheltered People as Percent of Total Homeless Population				
Year	# People	# Unsheltered People	% of Unsheltered Homeless	% Change of Unsheltered People from 2006
2006	441	115	26%	--
2007	579	168	29%	46%
2008	462	135	29%	17%
2009	745	199	27%	73%
2010	976	363	37%	216%
2011	566	269	48%	134%
2012	724	171	24%	48%

In terms of raw numbers, the number of unsheltered people has trended upwards since 2006, going from 115 in 2006 to a high point of 363 in 2010 and decreasing to 171 in 2012. Yet it has remained roughly one quarter of the total homeless population. We continue to have a significant percentage and number of people, including families, who are living outside the accepted continuum of care that spans from emergency shelter to transitional and permanent housing.

*“The experience of homelessness is deeper and darker than it has been in the past; the issue is a qualitative, rather than quantitative one.”*

*– Danny Kadden, Interfaith Works*

## The Costs of Shelter

Numerous focus group participants called for a “cost benefit analysis” of the current system of shelter resources to provide a means of evaluating our current system of shelter. The following chart presents a simple comparison of programs, citing the staff structure (volunteer vs. professional staff), type of facility (tent, single-family residence, or multi-story facility), along with the operational costs per year and number of clients accommodated. Included in this chart is the cost per day for housing jail inmates, 122 of whom will be released to homelessness.

The apparent tiers of cost show the difference between programs with volunteers vs. professional staff and the cost of a converted residential structure vs. a dedicated multi-story facility. One outlier tier is the high cost of running a homeless youth shelter, which is subject to stringent operating regulations. However, the greatest difference is between all homeless shelters and the county jail, which is included given the high number of homeless inmates included in the expanded homeless census numbers—a total of **122 people who will be released to homelessness when they leave incarceration**.

Shelter & Homeless Services – Cost/Benefit Matrix (2011 Data)			
Shelter or Service Agency	Program Budget	Number of People Served	Cost per day or Service Unit
<b>Bread &amp; Roses</b> (Volunteer-based, nonprofit-owned duplex)	\$60,000	12 people 4,380 bednights/year	\$13.70 per bednight
<b>Camp Quixote</b> (Volunteer-based, tent accommodations)	\$74,000	28 bed capacity 10,220 bednights/year	\$7.24 per bednight
<b>Drexel House – CCS</b> (Professionally staffed, multi-story facility)	\$560,000	51 bed capacity 18,615 bednights/year	\$30.08 per bednight
<b>Haven House – CYS</b> (Professionally staffed, converted residence, secured population)	\$741,100	10 bed capacity 3,650 bednights/year	\$203.04 per bednight
<b>Out of the Woods</b> (Volunteer-based, church-owned single-family home)	\$67,500	12 bed capacity 2,921 bednights/year	\$23.11 per bednight
<b>SafePlace</b> (Staffed by professionals and volunteers, multi-story facility, low security)	\$517,891	28 bed capacity 10,220 bednights/year	\$50.67 per bednight
<b>Thurston County Jail</b> (Professionally staffed, high security lock-up)	Unknown	Unknown	\$92 per bednight*

*This chart presents a comparison of shelter and social service costs, the number of people served and the cost per service unit.*

*\*Figure quoted by Thurston County Drug Court on cost of incarceration.*



## Loss of Shelter and Transitional Housing Continuum

As shown in the chart on page 31, there continue to be more homeless people than capacity for shelter or transitional housing beds. As a creative response to the increased needs to accommodate the homeless, new forms of shelter and transitional housing have arisen in recent years. However, because these forms of shelter do not meet certain zoning and building code standards, their operations are subject to government regulation to ensure that the occupants are safe and that the concerns of surrounding neighbors are addressed.



*During the January 2012 snowstorm, homeless people struggled to find shelter from the elements*

## Cold Weather Overflow Shelters

For over 20 years, there has been a succession of “Cold Weather Overflow Shelters” that operate during the cold weather months, between November 1 through March 31, to accommodate single men, single women, and families on nights when the temperature drops below freezing.

Presently, these overflow shelters offer up to 55 beds and are managed by several faith-based nonprofits. **There is no overflow shelter for unaccompanied youth.** The single women’s shelter is coordinated by Interfaith Works, offers up to 18 beds, and rotates every two weeks to participating faith-based communities in the urban core. The Salvation Army operates a 25-bed shelter for single men that’s hosted in their cafeteria area. St. Michael’s Church in Olympia and Sacred Heart Church in Lacey jointly operate a second overflow shelter that offers 12 beds for men. The shelter for families with children was converted in 2011 from a rotating shelter to a permanent church-based shelter.

## Permanent Church-Based Shelters

Faith communities continue to become increasingly involved in providing emergency shelter.

Since 2006, the Unitarian Universalist Church on the far west side of Olympia has operated the “Out of the Woods” emergency shelter for families with children. Since mid-2010, the First Christian Church in downtown Olympia has hosted the Family Support Center’s year-round homeless shelter for families with children. Faith communities in Rochester, Tenino and Yelm are also beginning to offer shelter. Other faith communities continue to explore stronger roles in providing shelter and services.



*Interfaith Works Director Danny Kadden facilitates a meeting with faith leaders to plan next year’s Cold Weather Shelter Program*



*Camp Quixote*

Inspired by a tent-based community in Portland, Oregon, called “Dignity Village,” Camp Quixote was created as a democratically run transitional housing camp to provide community for people who would otherwise be living in cars, abandoned buildings, or vehicles. Camp Quixote currently provides tent-based shelter for up to 28 individuals without children. As currently regulated by ordinance, the camp rotates every three months to a new location hosted by a faith-based community. The ordinances in Thurston County and the City of Olympia were recently changed to allow the camp to be hosted for up to six months in each location.

Supporters of Camp Quixote are currently working with county and City of Olympia officials to relocate the camp to a permanent location on county-owned property located inside the City of Olympia. The intent is to create a village composed of bedroom-sized cottages around a community center with a kitchen, social space, showers and bathrooms, and laundry facilities.

The City of Olympia recently amended its zoning regulations to allow a permanent encampment and a formal application has been submitted by the county and Panza (Camp Quixote’s support organization) on behalf of Camp Quixote to create the permanent location.

## Camp Quixote Transitions to Quixote Village – Tents to Cottages

Camp Quixote, a “tent city” homeless camp located in the urban hub is getting closer to becoming a permanent cottage-based village with the support of \$1.5 million dollars in state funding and land donated by Thurston County.

In the past 10 years, “tent cities” have emerged as an informal housing facility, sometimes sanctioned by local governments, other times created without sanction by homeless people or protestors. In 2007, **Camp Quixote**, the local tent city, was created as an act of protest against a local ordinance to ban sidewalk sitting.



*A resident’s home at Camp Quixote*

# BACKGROUND OF THE HOMELESS CENSUS

## The Ten-Year Plan to End Homelessness

The Thurston County Ten-Year Plan, first adopted in 2005 and revised in 2010, requires that we track progress toward the goal of reducing homelessness by half. Since 2006, the first year of the Ten-Year Plan, homelessness in Thurston County has instead increased by 28%.

The Ten-Year Plan was a product of the 2005 State Legislature’s “Homeless Housing and Assistance Act” as a way to guide statewide efforts to reduce homelessness in Washington State by fifty percent by July 1, 2015. The creation of the “Ten-Year Plan” approach marked a significant change in how Thurston County, much like other counties across the state, responds to homelessness.

Historically in Thurston County a small group of homeless housing and service providers had collaborated to **manage** homelessness with very limited and, in most cases, dwindling resources. The Ten-Year Plan now requires all counties in Washington State—including Thurston County—to work toward **ending** homelessness.

In addition to the Ten-Year Plan, the act provided funding generated by surcharge fees on recording documents in each county, with some funds retained by the state. These surcharge monies fund the Thurston County Affordable Housing and Homeless Housing Program.

Specifically, the act requires the county to:

- Develop a Ten-Year Homeless Plan to reduce homelessness by 50% by the year 2015.
- Use a portion of local document recording fees to reduce homelessness.
- Conduct an annual Point-in-Time Homeless Census.
- Implement the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS).
- Report annually to the state legislature.



***The Ten-Year Plan requires a focus on ending homelessness, not just managing it***

## Ten-Year Plan Accomplishments: 2006 - 2010

In the first five years, Thurston County spent more than \$7.5 million in federal and local funds on affordable and homeless housing, including shelter and transitional housing projects that assisted 613 homeless families and individuals and for housing support services. The target goal in 2005 was to create 300 new units of permanent housing by 2015. In the first half of the Ten-Year Homeless Plan, 180 new units were completed.

In addition, 223 at-risk households were provided transitional housing under the Tenant-based Rental Assistance Program and over \$900,000 was provided to local housing agencies to support operations and maintenance costs.





*The need for shelter beds increases as the number of homeless individuals increases*

## Ten-Year Plan Revised Housing Goals: 2011 – 2015

Despite significant gains made during the first five years, Thurston County's homeless population has grown from 441 persons in 2005 to 566 in 2011—an increase of 28%. This growth in population necessitates the need for a renewed focus on the county's homeless problem, requiring new and higher benchmark goals, housing strategies, and supportive services.

The first half of the Ten-Year Plan (2006 - 2010) called for 225 new permanent housing units and 16 new shelter beds being built. The new target goal for housing is to create **690 units** of low-income and affordable housing by **creating 150 homeless units, 200 affordable units, and providing 340 new housing rental assistance vouchers**. The plan will be updated as needed to ensure that it is consistent with the federal strategies identified in the *Federal Strategic Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness*.

Following is a summary of the revised Ten-Year Plan goals:

1. Expand the Supply of Homeless Housing Units:  
150 new units (39 new units by 2013).
2. Expand the Supply of Affordable Housing Units:  
200 Affordable Housing Units (137 new units by 2013).
3. Expand the Supply of Rental Assistance:  
Rental assistance for 340 homeless and at-risk households.
4. Preserve Existing Subsidized and Low-income Housing.

5. Consolidate Homeless Resources and Improve Service Delivery.
6. Maximize Housing Funding Opportunities.
7. Enhance Supportive Housing Services and Prevention.
8. Establish a Coordinated System for Discharging Clients Leaving Jail and Treatment Facilities.
9. Conduct Adequate Data Collection and Planning to Efficiently Manage Limited Resources for Homelessness.
10. Change Policy, Law and Legislation Where Necessary.

*Information above excerpted from the original 2005 Thurston County Ten-Year Plan and the "Thurston County Ten-Year Homeless Housing Plan Revision" dated December 2010, prepared in collaboration of the Thurston County HOME Consortium and the HOME Citizens Advisory Committee.*

## History of Thurston County's Census

Thurston County pioneered the concept of the "point-in-time" homeless census now practiced statewide. This innovation arose from over 25 years of collaborative efforts between non-profits, local governments, and faith communities.

In the early 1990's, there were initial efforts by Community Action Council and other local service providers to enumerate the number of local homeless people.



*Census volunteers are vital to counting our homeless population*

In 2002, Selena Kilmoyer, of the Thurston County Housing Task Force, recognized the problem of serving an undefined population. The solution to this problem was to find out how many homeless people there were by counting them.

Kilmoyer presented this idea to the Thurston County Housing Task Force, and proposed that Task Force members conduct a homeless census to determine how large the homeless population was. Theresa Slusher of the Thurston County Housing Authority, now Homeless Coordinator, further developed this idea into a viable work plan. Drawing on Housing Authority staff resources and Housing Task Force representatives from all local service and shelter providers, the Task Force launched the first comprehensive census of homeless people in the county in 2003.

This approach was recognized by Tedd Kelleher of the State Department of Community Trade & Economic Development (CTED, now known as the Department of Commerce) as a valuable way to evaluate efforts to end homelessness and apportion funding. The 2005 state “Homeless Housing and Assistance Act” codified this practice, and created a mandate for all counties that received state and federal homeless and housing funds to use the census as a way to measure performance and document needs for continued future funding.

Aside from the practical result of creating the statewide “Point-in-Time Count of Homeless Persons,” the process of developing the census underscored the value of collaboration between faith-based communities, non-profits and the government. The problem of homelessness spills over/across all parts of the community; linking these



*10-Year Plans are created by a broad range of elected officials, service providers, community activists and the homeless themselves*



*Local services are often funded by state and federal grants*

diverse elements to work together is essential to making progress. This collaboration between government, non-profits, and faith-based communities was a guiding principal in making the homeless census successful.

### Federal Government's Role in Census



The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) reports to Congress on the number of homeless people in the United States. HUD directs federal McKinney grant recipients to perform a point-in-time count of homeless persons during the last full week of January.

In order to avoid duplication of efforts, the state-mandated count is conducted on the fourth Thursday in January. This year the count occurred on January 29, 2012.

HUD uses the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) to track data and locally implemented homeless counts to arrive at the number of sheltered and unsheltered homeless people and the characteristics of homeless people living in shelters.

The report offers a baseline for reports that explore patterns of homelessness over time. Homeless service providers across the country, such as emergency shelters and transitional and supportive housing programs, collect information about their clients to match it with information from other providers to get accurate counts of homeless clients and the services they need.



## Washington State's Role in Census

The 2005 State's "Homeless Housing and Assistance Act" requires an annual count of homeless persons in

Washington State. The purpose of these guidelines is to define the common elements required of all local counts, to ensure that data is comparable between counties, and to ensure that confidentiality is protected. Communities are encouraged to adapt this basic framework for the annual census to the specific conditions and infrastructure of their community.

Local government is directed to make every effort to count all homeless individuals living outdoors, in shelters, and in transitional housing, coordinated, when reasonably feasible, with already existing homeless census projects including those funded in part by HUD under the McKinney-Vento homeless assistance program. The department determines, in consultation with local governments, the data to be collected. All personal information collected in the census is confidential, and the department and each local government is to take all necessary steps to protect the identity and confidentiality of each person counted



## Thurston County's Role in Census

Thurston County is the local unit of government mandated ([RCW 43.185C](#)) to count the county's homeless population annually.



The results of this count are reported to both the state and federal governments. Additionally, the county's census report includes an expanded definition to include people living with friends or family, people in jail and mental or other health facilities that will be released to homelessness. This information helps local governments, non-profits, faith communities, and others to understand the extent of homelessness, its impact on local resources, and helps to develop strategies to reduce the number of people without permanent homes.

The County plays a crucial role in ensuring a comprehensive census that identifies all local homeless people, including rural areas surrounding Bucoda, Rainier, Tenino and Yelm.

Homeless people from beyond the urban core often find refuge "off the grid" of traditional shelter and services, which can limit the usefulness of urban-oriented census methodologies.

## City of Olympia's Role in Census

Thurston County contracts with the City of Olympia to conduct the census, analyze the results, and to produce a final report.



Olympia has a unique role related to Thurston County's homeless population. While homelessness is a regional problem, its locus is concentrated in Olympia because it is the urban core of the county. Federal, state, and local funds support a vibrant continuum of services, shelter and housing, most of which are located within Olympia.

This means that homeless people from more rural areas like Bucoda or Rochester gravitate towards the urban core. As shown in this report, the number of homeless people exceeds the number of shelter beds and transitional housing units, which means that unsheltered homeless people must resort to car camping on the streets, sleeping in public parks, using libraries as warming centers, and other areas not primarily intended to serve as de facto homeless facilities. As a result, Olympia becomes a focal point in addressing many local homeless policies and strategies.



*As the number of homeless people exceed the number of shelter beds and transitional housing units, more people may resort to areas not intended to serve as de facto homeless facilities*

## OFF THE GRID: WHERE THE UNSHELTERED HOMELESS SEEK REFUGE



*Many homeless women and unaccompanied youth sleep on sidewalks when shelters are full; many believe they're safer being out in the open*

In 2012, the majority of homeless people (76%) were in either **emergency homeless shelters** (171 people) that offer shelter for up to 90 days, or **transitional housing** (382 people) that offer more secure housing for up to two years. Shelter and transitional housing represent two of the core strategies of the Ten-Year Plan to end homelessness.

**Yet nearly a quarter** of the people in this census, a total of 171, **were unsheltered**, or living “off the grid”, limiting our understanding of who they are and how best to respond to their homelessness.

The “unsheltered” find refuge by sleeping on the streets, camping in the woods, living in substandard or abandoned buildings or living in vehicles. The census was able to find some of the unsheltered, particularly those located in the urban core. But, according to anecdotal reports, many more go unseen, working diligently to avoid detection, particularly in rural areas where there are more limited services to draw them out.

Some homeless people remain unsheltered because they don't fit into traditional shelter programs or transitional housing programs for numerous reasons:

- Dogs are not allowed in most shelters  
*(Many homeless consider dogs their family)*
- Drug and alcohol addiction
- Severe mental illness
- Lack of age-appropriate shelter for youth  
*(Only 11 shelter beds for youth)*
- Lack of family shelter that maintains family cohesion  
*(Homeless families often choose car camping over dormitory style facilities)*

Such barriers make it nearly impossible for entry into the system. Living unsheltered makes it very difficult to stabilize an addiction problem, seek medical treatment for mental health conditions or participate in case management.

Looking at how the unsheltered accommodate themselves will help to identify new strategies to strengthen the Ten-Year Plan to reduce homelessness. Following is an examination of the ways that the unsheltered homeless seek refuge.

### Snapshot: Unsheltered on the Streets in the Urban Core

Downtown Olympia is widely considered the urban hub of Thurston County, and it draws many people, including the homeless. According to downtown neighborhood president David Scherer Waters, this area is home to 1,900 residents and many street-level businesses. These businesses include

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*“My heart goes out to anyone living on the street, regardless of the cause: crushing poverty, substance abuse or kids who don't feel safe or loved in their homes. Unfortunately, their problem affects everyone: business, government and the community as a whole.*

*Sadly, customers stay away when a business entrance smells of urine or feces. Shoppers often shop elsewhere to avoid panhandlers or crowds of people just hanging out. This makes it harder for downtown businesses to produce the tax revenue that funds governments and social service agencies to help solve the problem.”*

*- Anonymous Participant,  
Business Owners Focus Groups*

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*Youth frequently stay on the streets to take advantage of store lights and awnings for safety and shelter*

entertainment (restaurants, live theaters, bars with or without live music and dancing), retail (shops offering a broad range of goods), professional offices, government offices and numerous non-profit agencies. To visitors and some residents, downtown Olympia serves as the easiest-to-find, most visible “living room” for the entire county.

#### **Characteristics of Homelessness in the Urban Hub:**

The most visible of all homeless people are concentrated in the urban hub of Olympia, followed secondly by homeless people holding signs at the entrances of nearby shopping centers. In particular, there are specific demographics that are predominant in the urban hub, including: homeless youth or transition-age youth; mentally ill homeless people; and homeless “travelers” who appear in the summer months. According to homeless people and their advocates, downtown is the only place they can gather for community, to access services or to seek shelter. A more limited number of people actually sleep, rest or sit on the sidewalks, presumably from a lack of other accommodations.

Given this range of visitors to the downtown core, there are ongoing conflicts of use of the sidewalks as a public space. According to homeless people and their advocates, the downtown core serves as a critical hub to access services; offers one of the very few public spaces in which they can gather for social purposes. Sidewalks often provide refuge from the elements under the numerous overhangs and building nooks. According to business owners and others,

business suffers as a direct result of the high concentration of homeless people in the downtown core and incidents, real or perceived, of anti-social behavior by homeless people. City officials continue to explore options to create a safer, more welcoming downtown for all.

**Shelter, Housing and Services Network:** The downtown hub contains the highest concentration of shelter, transitional housing and social services in the County. The organizations that provide some level of service to homeless people and those at risk of homelessness, include: Community Youth Services, Partners in Prevention and Stonewall Youth – all of which serve youth and transition-age youth; Salvation Army and the Union Gospel Mission, both of which serve predominantly single adults; Capital Clubhouse which serves people with mental illness; Family Support Center which serves families with children; and, SafePlace, which serves victims of domestic and sexual violence. Other less formal service providers include faith-based organizations like City Gates Ministries, which serves low-income and homeless people; Covenant Creatures, which provides food and supplies for the pets of low-income and homeless people; and, the First Baptist Church that provides a weekly meal for homeless and very low-income people. Additionally, there are secular service providers that include the “Emma Goldman Youth Homeless Outreach Project” (EGYHOP) which distributes supplies, and “Food not Bombs”, which provides volunteers for mobile food kitchens.

Other public or non-profit facilities also provide accommodations not found or welcoming elsewhere for



*Sidewalks serve as a de facto social center for the homeless*

the homeless and those at risk, including the YMCA; Percival Landing and the Olympia Community Center (public showers and lobby areas); Intercity Transit (transportation and a de facto community center on wheels); and, the Olympia Timberland Library (day center offering shelter from the elements).

**Unique Challenges:** Downtown sidewalks are a public facility with competing uses. For businesses, the public sidewalks offer access to potential customers. For non-profit organizations, the public sidewalks offer centralized access to potential clients. For homeless people and those at risk, the public sidewalks offer de facto social service accommodations, functioning as a drop-in center and offering sleeping accommodations. There are no identified public areas where homeless people are accepted in the downtown core. As a result of complaints, they are often displaced from specific sidewalks or parks without clear options of where they could go.



*The prevalence of homelessness in the urban core can desensitize other citizens*

#### **Collateral Impacts of Urban Homelessness:**

The primary impact of urban homelessness is the potential severing of community ties caused by service models that target “homeless people” rather than “community members”. The most successful programs emphasize community ties and responsibilities, while less successful programs emphasize individual responsibility or simply provide shelter.

The charts on page 11 show that while only 51% of the homeless stated the last permanent residence was in Olympia, 90% of them are now located in Olympia, presumably to access shelter, transitional housing and the high concentration of services. This phenomenon of population transfer supports the belief that homelessness is primarily an urban problem.



*Public facilities provide the homeless with options for the most basic of human needs*

A secondary impact of urban homelessness is that the real or perceived high concentrations of homeless people who gather on sidewalks have a negative impact on local businesses.

This real or perceived negative impact has been the impetus for ongoing efforts by Olympia officials to enact laws and policies that discourage sitting and lying down on the sidewalks; aggressive panhandling; panhandling near ATM machines and parking pay stations; and, remove certain low-cost, high-alcohol content products in the urban hub.



*Parks intended for recreational use are often used by homeless people as de facto shelters or day centers*





*When the shelters are full, people seek camping areas in public parks and greenbelts*

### **Strategic Responses:**

**Designate Homeless-friendly areas:** Identify areas that are appropriate gathering places for homeless people with reasonable accommodations, i.e. benches or overhangs.

**Homeless-friendly public restrooms:** Identify restrooms and/or hygiene centers that are welcoming to homeless people. Explore policies and programs that encourage positive behavior in the downtown core, and penalize only illegal behavior.

**Downtown Community Dialogue:** Create more opportunities to bridge the gaps between business owners, the homeless and their advocates and service providers.

**Build partnership approaches:** Foster partnerships between the business sector, homeless service providers and local government to present a more integrated approach to service referrals, litter control, and encouraging civility standards.

**Incentivize positive behaviors:** Negotiate a balance of programs to incentivize desired behavior and laws that penalize anti-social behavior with safeguards to avoid abuse of penalties.

### **Snapshot: Unsheltered in Urban Parks and Greenbelts**

The urban hub of Thurston County has numerous parks, greenbelts intended for recreational use, and greenbelts intended to serve as buffers adjacent to public right-of-ways like freeways and rail lines. These areas include 39 parks in Olympia, 24 in Lacey and 12 in Tumwater.

Additionally, there are numerous greenbelts that connect public facilities like the Washington State Department of Ecology and St. Martin's University.

Many of these areas, intended for recreation or to serve as buffers, are increasingly being used as campgrounds for homeless people. Particularly areas that are located adjacent to major shopping areas where homeless people can hold signs asking for money or within some proximity to social services. These camp grounds are typically included in the PIT Homeless Census through a "Field Census" of known camp sites.

There is an outer ring of parks and green belts occupied by homeless campers who have significantly less reliance on services. In particular, the Capitol Forest contains an unknown number of campsites that are too remote to include in the census.

**Service Network:** There is no dedicated social service network for public parks and greenbelts. Instead, there is proximity to services located in the urban hub. The staffing for these natural areas is predominantly oriented toward grounds maintenance and conducting recreation programs. The current mandate for most parks and grounds staffing is to clear out homeless campers and clean up all camp sites. There are similar although less frequent efforts to patrol and clear greenbelt areas and right-of-way areas adjacent to the freeway.

**Unique Challenges:** While there are 228 shelter beds dedicated to specific population groups in the urban hub, there remain a persistent number of homeless people who camp in the surrounding areas. Many of these homeless



*Some homeless people "car camp" in the parking areas of public parks, hoping to avoid detection*



campers are people who can't find shelter or housing because of their criminal backgrounds, particularly for sex-offenders. At the time of the Homeless Census, there were 31 registered sex offenders listed as transients.

Others are unable or unwilling to cooperate with the formal rules of shelters like the Salvation Army, or the requirements of government subsidy programs like state and County veterans assistance programs. Still others simply prefer to live entirely "off the grid" and are homeless by choice, although many of these individuals qualify for mental health services they do not access. Given their disconnect from formal services, it is difficult to accurately assess their needs.

There is a significant impact on public and other resources to clear camps and then clean up the campsites. As one example, City of Olympia currently directs Parks staff to regularly patrol all Olympia parks to discourage homeless campers. Additionally, there are some volunteer neighborhood groups that patrol and sometimes clear camps.

***Collateral Impacts of Homelessness in Parks and Greenbelts:*** While many of these areas go undetected, an increasing number are discovered by park officials, park users or neighbors who complain to the local jurisdiction about safety concerns, garbage, human waste and the cumulative negative impacts on the environment. Significant public resources are expended in camp clearances.

#### **Strategic Responses:**

**Public camping areas:** Identify areas where homeless people can legally camp and provide for garbage removal and latrines.

**Park outreach:** Expand upon "street outreach" programs to provide intervention and referrals to community-based services.

### **Snapshot: Unsheltered on a College Campus**

Evergreen is a small, liberal arts state college located northwest of Olympia in an unincorporated area of the County. As with other colleges, Evergreen has many buildings that are open late and have many seating areas intended to support higher education. These areas are minimally patrolled by campus police.



*While this is not an unusual site on a college campus, what's not well known is how many students like this are actually homeless*

The school property is heavily wooded with nearly 1,000 acres of second growth forestland and trails.

The undergraduate student population is typically low-income and dependent upon low-wage jobs, loans and other subsidies to support their studies. With rising tuition costs and increased competition for low-wage jobs, some students find themselves unable to pay for both tuition and living costs.

This equation results in a small and hidden percentage of students who remain enrolled but live in their cars, the woods or "couch-surf" with friends. 2012 marks the second year of including the Evergreen campus in the PIT Homeless Census, although the "**point-in-time**" methodology is not effective in a campus setting and is replaced by a survey. See Chapter 5 on page 26 for those results.

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*"From my personal experience, eventually you just run out of family you can stay with, friends who will help you out. You just run out and then there's nowhere to go."*

*College Student,  
Focus Group Participant*

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*On a college campus, libraries, cafeterias, and study areas have isolated areas that offer refuge to a homeless student*

**Service Network:** Evergreen is served by a number of student organizations that provide traditional support to assist students with housing, eating and social networking. Evergreen does not host traditional non-profit organizations on campus, although staff will provide referrals where possible. There is an informal network of services through loosely configured organizations like “Food not Bombs” to provide food and through socially-based networks to identify temporary shared housing, parking areas to live in a car or places to camp in the woods. The latter two accommodations are euphemistically termed “Z Dorm”, as a reference to the formal dormitories labeled by the alphabet. Students also use community-based resources, such as the Olympia Food Bank.

**Unique Challenges:** Homelessness in higher education is a hidden phenomenon. As with many other homeless people, homeless students are keen to avoid the stigma of being identified as such. They are further disinclined to reveal their informal accommodations given that car-camping and tent-camping violate campus rules. Given the typical age of undergraduate students, many students at risk of homelessness have limited life experiences to equip them to negotiate service agencies or other resources. Older students may be returning to school due to economic hardship and unable to access sufficient employment or subsidies to maintain a home. Evergreen is somewhat geographically and socially isolated from the social service agencies based in the urban hub, although there is excellent access to public transportation.

**Collateral Impacts of College Homelessness:** The primary impact of college homelessness is upon the affected college

students who face significant stress in addition to the traditional demands of academic life. College level students do not have the support of a McKinney-Vento Act-funded program to monitor their well-being, count them annually or otherwise take action to ensure that there will be no student left behind.

#### **Strategic Responses:**

**College-based housing and shelter:** Evergreen possesses institutional resources to set aside blocks of housing units to serve as emergency housing for homeless students.

**Exchange program for homeless students:** College housing officials could explore programs to encourage a domestic “Student Exchange” that would match low-income students from out of state with host families associated with the school.

**Partner with community-based service providers:** Administrators could expand upon current staff practices of referrals to community-based services or faith-based communities.

#### **Snapshot: Unsheltered in Rural Yelm**

Yelm is a rural community of 6,848 (2010 US Census) based in southeast Thurston County that serves as a regional hub for homeless and other social services, including both formal and informal services. As the largest municipality among the smaller cities, it offers a useful model for understanding homelessness in a rural setting.

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*“Local governments in rural areas have a tough job. While Yelm does serve as a social service hub for the surrounding area of 40,000 to 50,000 people, Yelm just does not have enough of a tax base to support all of the needs. We need to find ways to share more of the money (countywide funding sources like HOME, Affordable Housing Program and Homeless Housing Program funding) with the rural parts of the county.”*

*– Anonymous Participant,  
Yelm Resident Focus Group*

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*Homeless campers in rural areas*

**Characteristics of Rural Homelessness:** There are very limited numbers of existing shelter beds in rural areas. As a result, homeless people more typically live in vehicles or substandard structures that do not meet housing standards. These substandard structures include abandoned houses, former barns and agricultural buildings or other substandard buildings lacking heat, lighting or the means to cook or bathe which meets the federal definition of homelessness. Rural homeless people tend to rely on informal networks of services for food, shelter or other needs and therefore fall beyond the radar of service providers or the state's HMIS data collection system. As a result, there is less information on or understanding of homelessness in rural areas.

**Service Network:** The Yelm network of social services are anchored by the Yelm Community Services Center and supported by a number of faith-based efforts and civic organizations. Key faith communities include the Emanuel Lutheran Church (provides an evening meal and food bank) and the Covenant Crossroads Community Church (provides an evening meal and food bank).

In addition, the Yelm Rotary and the Yelm Lion's clubs each participate in food programs. There are a total of 6 formal shelter beds supplemented by additional shelter resources offered informally in faith-based facilities.

**Unique Challenges:** Yelm, like other rural communities, is challenged by a lack of locally based resources. Rural community leaders express concerns about not receiving a proportionate share of available public funding (Yelm focus group, Appendix A, page 2). Rural areas are further challenged by limited public transportation resources for rural people in need who have to travel to access services in the urban hub.

**Collateral Impacts of Rural Homelessness:** The primary impact of rural homelessness is that rural homeless people are often forced to migrate toward services and lose their community ties. As shown in the charts on page 11, the census reveals a lopsided distribution showing lower numbers of homeless people in the rural areas and concentrated numbers in the urban areas. This phenomenon of population transfer supports the belief that homelessness is primarily an urban problem.

#### **Strategic Responses:**

**Proportionate funding for rural areas:** Rural homeless advocates call for proportionate fiscal support for rural service providers.

**Partnering with faith communities:** Faith community resources may offer the single greatest opportunity to expand the service network.

**Zoning reforms:** Local governments could support faith-based efforts through a reconfiguration of zoning regulations that would allow for an expansion of shelters and service centers within existing faith community facilities.

# EMERGING MODELS TO RESPOND TO HOMELESSNESS

There have been numerous advances in how society responds to homelessness. Service providers, policy makers and other experts across the country have examined traditional models and pioneered new approaches.

Locally, four of these proven models have been adopted into the strategies and practices employed to reduce homelessness. The four emerging models are presented here.

## 1) Homeless Coordinator Hired

After years of community dialogue, the Thurston County HOME Consortium and the Thurston County Board of County Commissioners finally hired a County Homeless Coordinator, **Theresa Slusher**, who will develop a coordinated, efficient support system for addressing the crisis of homelessness in Thurston County.

Initial goals presented by the HOME Citizens Advisory Committee include:

- a. **Assessment of the Current System:** Meet with area providers, public officials and other stakeholders to assess the current system and collect information on resources, gaps and better strategies to reduce homelessness;
- b. **Ten-Year Plan Update:** Convene work groups to develop more effective strategies for addressing homelessness;
- c. **Enhanced Data Management:** Initial phase to ensure full utilization of the state Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) by all providers; and
- d. **Begin Implementation of a Revised Ten-Year Plan:** Coordinate communitywide implementation of Ten-Year Plan strategies to prevent and reduce homelessness.



*Families with children are a growing percentage of homeless*

## 2) Coordinated Point of Entry

Coordinating homeless services and shelter and housing referrals is a “**best practice**” intended to maximize the use of precious resources. It will also soon be a requirement of receiving state funding as of December 31, 2013.

The County’s first “**coordinated point of entry**” program has been in operation for half a year, producing some impressive results. Funded by the City of Olympia’s “Homeless Prevention Program” this program provides a coordinated point of entry into the network of homeless shelter and services. Three separate agencies make up the “Homeless Prevention Partnership,” with each agency serving as one hub of the intake center - Interfaith Works serving single adults; Community Youth Services serving unaccompanied youth; and, Family Support Center serving families with children. The following is a summary of their progress to date:

- **SideWalk:** 308 people served, referrals for 5,421 shelter bed nights, 20 referrals to housing, mobilized 42 volunteers, initiated a growing pool (\$16,000) of faith community-funded rental assistance to help provide **Housing First** for homeless people and those at risk of homelessness.
- **Community Youth Services:** 25 youth supported with extended drop-in center hours.
- **Family Support Center:** 78 families avoided eviction, 56 families relocated to housing, and 1,005 households with 1,412 adults and 1,372 children were served.



Each agency provides intake, assessment, referrals and light case management for their specific populations – unaccompanied youth; families with children and single adults, both men and women; and, client data collection and entry into the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS).



*"Housing First" provides more stability and independence than shelters*

In a related development, the State Department of Commerce is developing policy to guide Consolidated Homeless Grant recipients to meet this deadline. The County's emerging "Consolidated Homeless Grant" program as funded by State Department of Commerce will also support a stronger adherence to utilizing a coordinated point of entry.

### 3) Housing First

**"Housing First"** is the currently accepted **best practice** for getting homeless people into housing first, with social services coming second. The Thurston County HOME Consortium has been prioritizing the use of the **Housing First** model through the extensive use of transitional housing vouchers known as "Tenant-based Rental Vouchers" or TBRA as evidenced on page 3, "Countywide Actions to Reduce Homelessness".

Many government reports and academic studies show that stabilizing people with housing first greatly improves outcomes for the residents and reduces overall costs to tax payers. The traditional model known as the "Continuum of Care" is based on moving homeless individuals and households through "levels" of housing,

progressively moving them closer to "independent housing" based upon their "housing readiness". Typically, homeless people would first go from the streets to a homeless shelter, then go from a public shelter to a transitional housing program, and from there to their own apartment or house in the community. **Housing First** moves the homeless individual or household immediately from the streets or homeless shelters into their own apartments.

#### **Wet Houses as a Subset of Housing First:**

Numerous studies show that it costs less to house the unsheltered, particularly high service-users like chronic inebriates, rather than shoulder the costs that pile up with police and emergency care. The **Housing First** approach offers stable housing for alcohol-dependent homeless individuals, who represent a large percentage of the unsheltered, without requirements of abstinence or treatment.

In a landmark Seattle study titled, "1811 Eastlake", the City found they **saved over 50% per resident of a "wet" house**, who cost less in stable housing than they do when they cycle through the jails, hospitals and emergency rooms. Stable housing also resulted in reduced drinking among homeless alcoholics, according to a Seattle-based study published in the Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA) on March 31, 2009.

*"The Housing First model was developed in response to the problem of long-term homelessness among those living with severe mental illnesses and substance abuse problems. In most US cities, people with behavioral health disabilities die on the streets far more frequently than any other subset of the homeless population. Before they die, they use large amounts of taxpayer-funded services in our healthcare and criminal justice systems. The housing program, known in Seattle as the 1811 Eastlake project, was created to stabilize people and stop them from endlessly cycling through emergency rooms, prisons and other crisis institutions, reducing the amount of taxpayer money spent on them."*

**William G. Hobson, a co-author on the JAMA paper**

A related study by the City of San Francisco Health Department found that San Francisco spends around \$13.5 million per year caring for its top 225 chronic public inebriates.





*“Wet Housing” is an emerging “Housing First” model that gets chronic inebriates off the street and saves money*

Officials there are developing programs based on the Seattle model to see if they can replicate the cost-reductions to taxpayers and get homeless inebriates off the street.

Promoting a housing program that allows alcoholics to drink at the public’s expense is a tough sell. However, saving significant amounts of taxpayers’ money that would otherwise be spent on this hard to house population makes sense in a tough economy. Couple that savings with the positive multiplier effect of relocating this population from the urban hub areas where they tend to congregate and it offers an even greater value for local businesses and their patrons who often feel burdened as the unwilling hosts of a de facto homeless center.

#### 4) Safe Parking Options

The Homeless Census identified 41 people who spent the night in their cars. Anecdotal reports from service providers suggest there are far more people living in their cars who diligently avoid detection by moving frequently or parking in remote locations, and as a result are not included in the census results.

In 2009, the HOME Consortium explored a pilot project to fund case management services for homeless people living in RV’s in partnership with host faith communities. These RV campers had been displaced from downtown

Olympia by an ordinance prohibiting car camping in the urban core. With case management and supportive faith communities who allowed them to park on church or Temple property, these RV campers were able to

- 1) Find a legal, if temporary, refuge;
- 2) Work with a case manager to seek services and permanent housing; and,
- 3) Reduce conflicts with other citizens who filed complaints about RV camping in neighborhoods and public parks

Unfortunately, the pilot project had only one year of funding.

Some local service providers and homeless advocates continue to urge the consideration of a similar “**safe parking program**” that would allow homeless people with cars to park in the parking lots of participating faith community facilities equipped with sanitation facilities and case management. In 2009, the HOME Consortium funded a pilot project to provide case management for a safe parking program. This program was created in response to a City of Olympia ordinance restricting RV camping in the downtown core, with funding for a part-time case manager to work with homeless households to seek resources and more stable housing options.



*Some homeless individuals and families try to maintain their independence by “camping” in their cars or RV’s*

Similar programs have been underway for years in areas as diverse as Eugene, Oregon, and Los Angeles and Santa Barbara, California. These **safe parking** programs provide accommodations for a significant number of people with only nominal costs of case management.

# METHODOLOGY

## Census Methodology

A comprehensive census of homeless people is challenging—it's hard to find people without a permanent home address. Many who are unsheltered strive to avoid detection by census workers and public officials alike. A continuing number of respondents refuse to participate in the census, claiming that local government uses the information to clear homeless camps or step up harassment of street-dependent people. While these clearances and police enforcement actions are typically initiated in response to complaints, the perceived linkage between the Homeless Census and clearance activities caused many unsheltered homeless people to conceal their camps, move their cars, and otherwise take steps to hide, making census work more challenging.

**Ice Storm Causes Delay:** The 2012 Census was further challenged by a late January ice storm, which delayed the date until January 29th. This delay was necessitated for numerous reasons: a) many potential Census volunteers were still busy recovering from storm damage; b) phone and power lines were down in rural Thurston County till shortly before the census, delaying contacts in those areas to ensure an accurate count; c) dangerous conditions in the woods eliminated access to the traditional areas of homeless camps (most public parks were closed due to hazardous conditions related to hanging tree limbs and fallen trees); and, d) numerous unsheltered homeless people had abandoned their cars because of freezing conditions or their camps to avoid being crushed by falling trees or buried by heavy snow fall.

The actual 2012 Census date went from 1:00 pm on Sunday, January 29<sup>th</sup> through 1:00 pm on Monday January 30<sup>th</sup>. This time frame allowed the work to be completed before the end of January as per State statute.

Over 130 community members volunteered to assist. The vast majority of the homeless were surveyed within the social service agencies and/or shelter and transitional housing facilities by professional staff. The census expanded the use of outreach events to draw in homeless people with special emphasis placed on reaching homeless families, homeless veterans and rural homeless people.

**HMIS Data Entry:** This was the second year of using the State's Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) to collect the data, with some agencies directly reporting their data online and the remainder collected via paper surveys and entered by Census workers.

Agency staff reported data on their homeless clients using the standards of eligibility for their services. The standard used by the census workers involved with the field and street census were instructed to survey those people who self-identified as homeless unless they obviously did not fit the criteria.

Following is an overview of the processes used to survey the homeless:

- **Direct Reporters:** Approximately 46% of the homeless data was directly entered into the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) database by agency staff with an additional 21% entered into HMIS with the assistance of Homeless Census staff. The remaining 33% was gathered by paper surveys and directly entered by Homeless Census staff. A growing number of service providers are becoming trained and proficient as necessary to be direct reporters. Ultimately, the County's goal is to encourage all providers to utilize HMIS to make it a comprehensive database on all service, shelter, and housing capacities and occupancies.
- **Evening Street Census:** A Sunday, January 29<sup>th</sup> evening street census was conducted in downtown Olympia specifically seeking homeless and street-dependent youth, conducted primarily by youth advocates and caseworkers.
- **Site-based Census:** On Monday morning, January 30<sup>th</sup>, census workers were stationed at numerous locations or regularly scheduled events likely to host homeless people, including the Salvation Army Luncheon; the Sunday evening meal at the First Baptist Church; the Olympia Downtown Library; all eight regional food banks; the Olympia Community Service Office (state's social services center); and, the Evergreen State College.
- **Homeless Connect Events:** Census workers helped to staff a number of local outreach events that featured food and other goods useful to the homeless and people at risk of homelessness. These events included

several Sunday, January 29, dinners including a youth meal at Reality Church. Monday, January 30<sup>th</sup> events included luncheons at Capital Clubhouse and the VFW Post, an evening meal at the Yelm Crossroads Covenant Church, and a Homeless Veterans outreach kiosk at Hawks Prairie.

- **Field Census of Homeless Camps Suspended:** The field survey of the known homeless camps was largely suspended this year due to the ice storm-related hazards of fallen trees, although several teams did go into areas without trees. Typically, census volunteers are sent out in teams to survey the areas of known homeless camps and other wooded areas in and around the urban core. This methodology has been controversial among some homeless people and their advocates as being invasive and potentially leading to camp clearances. However, field surveys are the most proactive means of reaching the hidden homeless who live “off the grid” of traditional shelter and service networks.

## Focus Groups

In addition to developing a plan for surveying the homeless, this census also provided for some community-based analysis of the census results. This process of community analysis was facilitated through a series of nine focus groups conducted as guided discussion groups charged with examining the census results and developing recommendations for reducing homelessness. Participants drawn from subsets of the community included a faith community group, a non-profit social service providers group, a downtown Olympia business group, a homeless adult group from Camp Quixote, club members at Capital Clubhouse, homeless advocates, college classes at the Evergreen State College, and Yelm residents.

Each focus group was presented with a matrix of the census results and a set of questions tailored to solicit their unique perspectives. The outcome of these focus groups was to produce a comprehensive list of recommendations that address the broad range of responsibility for responding to homelessness. These recommendations are included in the appendix and are summarized in both the “Executive Summary” and the “Recommendations” section.

## Summary of Focus Group Recommendations

Following is a brief summary of the top recommendations to emerge from the focus groups:

- **Build Community Awareness:** Understanding multiplies our effectiveness and mobilizes more people and new ideas to resolve homelessness. Provide “plain talk” information that explains homelessness to people not already involved. (3<sup>rd</sup> year in a row)
- **Day Center:** Offer a welcoming place to get people off the street. This helps homeless people and reduces conflict between the business community and street-dependent populations. (2<sup>nd</sup> year in a row)
- **More Affordable Housing:** Best solution to homelessness is to provide more affordable housing. Support emergency shelters, but **PRIORITIZE Rapid Re-housing** (programs that get homeless people back into housing as soon as possible) **Housing First** (programs that stabilize people first with housing, and provide supportive services second). (3<sup>rd</sup> year in a row)
- **More Public Bathrooms:** Designate “**Homeless-Friendly**” public bathrooms that are open 24 hours a day. Many homeless people have no available bathroom or bathing facilities and risk arrest for the most basic of human needs.
- **Safe Parking Program:** Accommodate people already living in their cars; provide case management and secure parking locations for homeless people at a low cost to benefit ratio. (2<sup>nd</sup> year in a row)
- **Don’t Criminalize Homelessness:** Develop public policy to resolve conflicts between street-dependent populations, business owners, and other stakeholders. (2<sup>nd</sup> year in a row)

To read a more comprehensive version of the “Focus Group Transcripts” refer to Appendix A.

## Status Report on the 2011 Recommendations

For the past three years, the Annual Homeless Census Report has presented a summary of recommendations that were developed by participants in a diverse series of focus groups and public forums. These recommendations were intentionally collected from a broad range of stakeholders to ensure a more comprehensive community perspective on what should be done to reduce homelessness. While some recommendations appear to be new ideas in Thurston County, many recommendations re-emphasize the current trends and activities already underway. Following is a status report on the 2011 recommendations:

- **Better Homeless Plan:**
  - **Recommendation:** The Ten-Year Plan needs to be a highly functional and well-understood guide to make local efforts successful. The plan must incorporate best practices to make better use of available resources.
  - **Status Report:** The new Homeless Coordinator will make this one of three top priorities.
- **Homeless Coordination:**
  - **Recommendation:** Make the system work better through coordination of centralized data, coordinated referrals, and strategic use of resources.
  - **Status Report:** 1) The new Homeless Coordinator is dedicated to coordinating the system; and, 2) the Olympia funded “Coordinated Point of Entry” is building capacity and serving as a model for future efforts.
- **Improve Community Cooperation:**
  - **Recommendation:** Support elected officials and service providers to work better together in order to be more effective.
  - **Status Report:** The HOME Consortium and the HOME Citizens Advisory Committee (HCAC) continue to work on improving the overall system of funding allocations and related efforts.
- **Don’t Criminalize Homelessness:**
  - **Recommendation:** Develop more constructive public policy to resolve conflicts between street-dependent populations, business owners, and other citizens.
  - **Staff Report:** As the urban core of the County, the City of Olympia continues to seek a balance of approaches to downtown conflicts involving homeless people, business owners and their patrons through an ongoing “Downtown Project” intended to make downtown safer and more welcoming for all. This effort has included an enhancement of an existing panhandling ordinance (February 2011) and the initiation of a “Downtown Ambassador” program to employ non-profit service agencies to provide service referrals to street-dependent people.
- **Create a Day Center:**
  - **Recommendation:** Get people off the street to reduce conflict between the business community and street-dependent populations.
  - **Status Report:** No action.
- **Safe Parking Program:**
  - **Recommendation:** Accommodate people already living in their cars; provide case management and secure parking locations for homeless people at a very low cost to benefit ratio.
  - **Status Report:** No action.
- **More Affordable Housing:**
  - **Recommendation:** Best solution to homelessness is to provide more affordable housing. In addition to emergency shelters, prioritize Rapid Re-housing (programs that get homeless people back into housing as soon as possible) and Housing First (programs that stabilize people first with housing, and provide supportive services second).
  - **Status Report:** HOME Consortium provided \$887,812 in funding for rental vouchers, providing assistance to over 132 households. Other new affordable housing construction projects are seeking additional funding.

- **Build Community Awareness:**
  - **Recommendation:** Understanding multiplies our effectiveness and mobilizes more people and new ideas to resolve homelessness.
  - **Status Report:** Local education occurs on numerous levels including high schools; colleges; civic organizations; faith communities; the Asset Building Coalition “Shared Learning” forum series; and, the annual Homeless Forum, which is now sponsored by Interfaith Works. The Annual Homeless Census Report is also becoming a more useful tool, utilized in many high school and college level settings.
- **Better Utilization of Shelter and Transitional Housing Capacities:**
  - **Recommendation:** Better management of resources. The census revealed 269 or 49% of respondents were unsheltered in spite of having the capacity to shelter 96% of the homeless.
  - **Status Report:** 1) The 2011 Homeless Census data was skewed by omitting data on shelters and transitional housing; 2) the SideWalk Coordinated Point of Entry project has significantly improved efficiencies in shelter placements; and, 3) the new Homeless Coordinator will specifically focus on better utilization as one of three top priorities.



## APPENDIX A—Summary of Focus Group Recommendations

The methodology of this census included a provision for community-based analysis of the census results. This process of community analysis was conducted through a series of nine focus groups charged with examining the census results and developing recommendations for reducing homelessness. These focus groups used participants drawn from subsets of the community, including a faith-based community group, a non-profit social service providers group, a homeless adult group from Camp Quixote, a homeless youth group from Community Youth Services and Partners in Prevention, a Tumwater High School group, and two Evergreen State College classes. Their recommendations are included in this appendix and are summarized in both the “Executive Summary” and the “Recommendations” section.

### Summary of Focus Group Recommendations

The Homeless Census results were looked at by a series of focus groups (for a description of the focus groups, please Methodology, Chapter 11, page 51. Each group looked at the statistics and developed recommendations for reducing homelessness. As a “community-based analysis” of the census results, these groups captured a broad range of perspective on how to respond to homelessness. Following are summaries of their recommendations:

#### *Capitol Clubhouse Focus Group*

- Respond with compassion not judgment.
- Open a facility for alcohol & drug addicted people – help them get off the streets
- Centralize homeless services in one building where the homeless are welcome
- Provide public restrooms as part of a public hygiene center
- Encourage more discussion and education

#### *Camp Quixote Focus Group*

- Realize that homelessness won’t just go away – Education!
- More compassion for homeless people – Recognize we aren’t bad people, just people in a bad situation
- Don’t criminalize homelessness
- Identify areas where homeless people **are allowed to** camp legally
- Help the homeless find jobs & become independent again

#### *College Student Focus Group*

- Educate – more information about homelessness and the contributing factors like a rough economy, mental illness, Social equity is an inalienable right, homelessness affects the entire community.
- Create special financial aid programs for homeless students, allow them to work for room and board to stabilize themselves
- Have (campus) housing set aside special units for homeless students
- Build a sustainable homeless shelter on campus
- Re-examine the priorities for government spending – human needs like shelter are critical

#### *Downtown Business Focus Group*

- Providing housing for the homeless would be cheaper than police action, jail time, etc...
- More education!
- Recognize that homelessness is one thing, behavioral problems are another
- Homelessness seems to be on the rise, especially from the perspective of downtown.
- Bring back the walking patrol – it really helped to resolve the behavioral problems

### ***Downtown Resident Focus Group***

- Generosity would be a good response
- We need more housing downtown period, increasing the ratio of residency would alleviate many problems
- Spend more on housing, less on services. Housing is the answer to homelessness
- We need a multi-prong response – this is not just a government, non-profit, faith community or business problem
- Homelessness is a regional problem, we need regional leadership and money

### ***Faith Leaders Focus Group***

- Encourage more compassion for the homeless
- Find new ways to build the capacity of service and shelter providers, both non-profits and faith-based efforts
- Education and volunteer participation are key
- Move from punitive measures to positive measures like services and resource distribution (don't criminalize homelessness)
- Talk less, do more

### ***Homeless Advocates Focus Group***

- Stop criminalizing homelessness
- Provide more housing & shelter as the cheapest solution
- Create a community center where homeless people are welcome – a place with showers, Laundromat, bathrooms, storage lockers
- Provide public bathrooms & hygiene centers
- Establish a wet-house or a chemical dependency center – not enough resources for drug and alcohol addicted homeless people.

### ***Non-Profit Organization Focus Group***

- Volunteering and education are the first steps in understanding and solving the issue
- Create a central service center(s) with bathrooms, a hygiene center, and other public resources
- Abolish anti-homeless policies (Stop criminalizing homelessness)
- Establish “wet” shelters and housing for homeless people with addictions – get them off of the streets
- Ask local government to be more efficient with money and other resources

### ***Yelm Focus Group***

- Education – we need to change people's attitudes about homelessness
- All services and shelter should be delivered locally – especially important in rural areas
- Need to re-examine local ordinances on tent-camping and car-camping
- Need to re-examine local ordinances that restrict church-based ministries to the poor and homeless
- Need to create service models that truly work county-wide, particularly the concept of a “coordinated point of entry” which has the potential to overlook rural areas
- Churches need to expand their homeless ministry capacities by installing showers and storage lockers and other facilities to better accommodate homeless people

## APPENDIX B—State Mandate: A Point in Time Count of Homeless People

The State Department of Commerce provides the guidelines for the “Point in Time Count of Homeless Persons,” also known as the Homeless Census. In short, the directive is to count individuals found living unsheltered (out of doors, in vehicles, or abandoned buildings) or in emergency shelters, transitional housing, and specifically defined permanent housing with supportive services. *“The department shall annually conduct a Washington homeless census or count consistent with the requirements of RCW 43.63A.655. The census shall make every effort to count all homeless individuals living outdoors, in shelters, and in transitional housing...”*

The Department of Commerce website posts the results of past homeless census numbers across the state for individuals, not households, as evidenced in the below-listed link.

<http://www.commerce.wa.gov/site/1064/default.aspx>

**Thurston County Point in Time Count of Homeless Persons**  
**Report to State Department of Commerce - March 30, 2012**

Part 1: Homeless Population	Sheltered		Unsheltered	Temporarily Living with Family or Friends*	
	Emergency	Transitional			
Number of Families with Children (Family Households):	11	83	1	9	<b>95</b>
Number of Households <u>without</u> Children:	119	108	134	120	<b>361</b>
Number of Households <u>without</u> Adults (nobody over 17 years old):	3	0	7	5	<b>10</b>
A. Number of Persons in Families with Children:	38	265	5	27	<b>308</b>
B. Number of Single Individuals and Persons in Households <u>without</u> Children:	126	112	151	123	<b>389</b>
C. Number of Persons in Households <u>without</u> Adults (nobody over 17 years old):	3	0	8	5	<b>11</b>
(Add Lines A & B & C) Total Persons:	<b>167</b>	<b>377</b>	<b>164</b>	<b>155</b>	<b>708</b>
Part 2: Homeless Subpopulations	Sheltered		Unsheltered*	Temporarily Living with Family or Friends*	
	Emergency	Transitional			
a. Chronically Homeless Individuals	18	NA	46	NA	
b. Chronically Homeless Families	1	NA	1	NA	
c. Persons in Chronically Homeless Families	3	NA	4	NA	
d. Mentally Disabled	26	54	63	83	
e. Persons with alcohol and/or other drug problems	9	15	13	4	
f. Veterans	17	18	20	4	
g. Persons with HIV/AIDS	0	0	0	0	
h. Victims of Domestic Violence	24	50	23	13	
i. Unaccompanied Youth (Under 18)	3	0	6	5	
j. Children (Under 18) in Families	23	154	4	15	
k. Physically Disabled	23	21	22	8	
l. Seasonal Agricultural Workers	0	0	1	2	
m. Persons with both substance use and mental health problems	3	13	6	4	
n. Senior citizens (aged 65 or older)	12	7	21	5	

\*Please note: many charts and narratives in this report are based on a higher total number of 724 as a result of discrepancies between the State database and local Thurston County Numbers in database queries.



# APPENDIX D—Thurston County Homeless Census Data for January 29, 2012

Total Count Numbers by Individual					
Individuals	723		Children 17 & under	188	27%
Males	363	53%	Adults 18-20	45	7%
Females	327	47%	Adults 21-25	87	13%
Transgendered	1	<1%	Adults 26-55	312	45%
Unaccompanied Minors	9	<1%	Adults 56-64	49	7%
Veterans	63	13%	Adults 65+	10	1%
Disabilities as Indicated by Individual* (727 Respondents)					
Physical (permanent)	78	11%	Developmental Disability	31	4%
Mental Health***	153	21%	HIV/AIDS	0	0%
Chronic Health Problem	60	8%	Alcohol or drug abuse	37	5%
None apply	234	32%			
Current Living Status by Individual (1110 Respondents – includes full count)					
Emergency Shelter/ Motel Voucher Program	171	15%	Permanent Supportive Housing	43	4%
Transitional Housing	382	34%	Vehicle	41	4%
Jail or Medical Facility *	172	16%	Abandoned Building	9	1%
Friends or Family *	156	14%	Out of Doors	121	11%
Situations that caused Homelessness for Households** (565 Respondents)					
Domestic Violence	111	15%	Alcohol or Drug Use	64	9%
Job Lost	107	15%	Family Break-up	156	22%
Evicted-Non-payment	54	8%	Convicted-Misdemeanor/Felony	28	4%
Lack of Job Skills	19	3%	Discharged Institution/Jail	9	1%
Lack of Child Care	9	1%	Loss of Temp Living Situation	46	6%
Medical Costs	14	2%	Out of Home Youth	19	3%
Mental Illness ***	92	13%	Aged out of Foster Care	21	3%
Medical Problems	98	9%	Don't Know/No Response	107	
All Sources of Household Income* (717 Responses)					
None	216	30%	Employed at low wage job	24	3%
Social Security	137	19%	Relatives, Partners, Friends	17	2%
Unemployment Insurance	13	2%	L & I Payments	1	<1%
Part –time Work	32	4%	VA Benefits	12	2%
Public Assistance	171	24%	Don't know/no response	172	36%
Length of Time Households Have Been Homeless (483 Responses)					
More than 1 year	366	63%	Less than 1 year	214	37%
More than 4 episodes of homelessness in 3 years	119	25%	Less than 4 episodes of homelessness in 3 years	364	75%

\*HUD Defined "Homelessness" does not include staying with friends & family or being in jails or medical facilities without a permanent address to be released to

\*\*More than one answer is possible. Summation of percentages will not equal 100%.

\*\*\*While 92 reported mental illness as the cause of their homelessness, 153 reported it as their disability

## APPENDIX E—Thurston County Ten-Year Homeless Housing Plan Excerpts from 2005 Plan and 2010 Revision

### Introduction

Homelessness is a concern that affects virtually every community in the United States. The homeless sleep in streets, in cars, underneath bridges, or at the homes of family and friends. They include adults and children, individuals and couples, mothers and fathers, sisters and brothers. They are homeless for a variety of reasons, such as mental illness, a physical disability, substance abuse, unemployment and low wages.

Homelessness takes a heavy toll on these individuals and their local communities. Homeless people are less able to find social services and jobs when their lives are eclipsed by the need to find shelter. They are also more likely to need costly emergency services because of the ravages of weather and crime, the inability to pay for preventative care and – in many cases – their own physical and mental disabilities. Communities with high rates of homelessness are also concerned about the character of their communities and the affect on nearby businesses.

This Ten-Year Plan is designed to reduce homelessness in Thurston County even further -- by 50 percent by July 2015. The Plan calls for creating 300 new permanent housing units, and guiding more people into services before they become homeless.

### Ten-Year Plan Revision Excerpts

In order to reduce the homeless population, we need to examine new models or approaches that allow the community to strategically allocate federal, county, and local housing resources to get people off the streets, out of the shelters, and into appropriate permanent housing linked with comprehensive supportive services. This Plan recommends a variety of new initiatives and strategies that target resources more efficiently and effectively. The major recommendations of the plan fall into four broad areas of need:

### The Need to Increase and Preserve the Supply of Affordable Housing

The Thurston County Consolidated Plan identifies small and large families as having the greatest housing problems in the county because they experience the greatest housing cost burden (paying a disproportionate share of their income for housing). Additionally, there is a significant affordability mismatch, with higher income persons occupying lower income housing units, which contributes to the shortage of affordable and available housing for low and very-low income persons.

### The Need for a Housing First Approach and a Flexible Rental Assistance Program

While the chronically homeless make up only 10% of the county's homeless population, they consume a disproportionate share of the county's homeless funds and housing resources because they generally require a higher level of comprehensive support services.

Historically, the county has relied on the Tenant-Based Rental Assistance Program (TBRA), paired with extensive case management services and the emergency shelter system, to meet this need. TBRA has been successful in reducing the

number of homeless who would otherwise have been on the streets and in providing much needed transitional housing. However, an excessively long Section 8 waiting list (up to five years) and the shrinking availability of federal funded housing vouchers makes it extremely difficult to move people off transitional housing into permanent housing.

The Housing First approach (also referred to as Rapid Re-housing) provides the missing link between the emergency shelter and transitional housing systems by quickly moving people into permanent housing first to provide housing stability and then providing them with the non-mandatory supportive housing services they need. This model is particularly effective and more appropriate for persons with long-term special needs and the chronically homeless. This plan also recommends that the county design a rental assistance program to compliment the TBRA Program that is flexible enough to meet the both short-term and the long-term needs of residents.

### **The Need for Better Coordination of Housing Resources and Services**

A major component of this plan is to strategically target homeless resources more effectively and improve the community's capacity to coordinate and deliver homeless services more efficiently. The Home Citizens Advisory Committee will formulate a plan to coordinate resources and placement.

### **The Need to Strategically Target Funds to Meet the County's Housing Goals**

Currently, the county distributes its federal and local housing funds through a Request for Proposal (RFP) process that targets funding primarily based on the needs of service providers, and to a lesser degree, the housing needs of the county. This plan recommends a change in funding strategy by moving towards a needs-driven process that ensures that the county's housing funds are strategically targeted to meet the prioritized housing needs of the community.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

The target goal is to create 350 new housing units and provide 340 new rental vouchers by 2015. The following is a summary of the ten objectives and short-term activities identified in the plan. Short term activities are defined as projects that are anticipated to be completed by 2013.

#### **❖ OBJECTIVE 1 – Expand the Supply of Homeless Housing Units**

Housing Strategy: Develop 150 housing units for homeless families, individuals, and special needs Populations (39 units to be completed by 2013)

- **Behavioral Health Resources**  
The B&B Apartments in Olympia will add 11 new units onto the existing complex of 16 units. The units will serve persons suffering from a mental illness.
- **Community Youth Services**  
Maternity/Parenting Housing Program in Olympia will develop 24 beds for homeless pregnant and parenting young adults (ages 18-23) experiencing multiple barriers to independence or are fleeing domestic violence.
- **SafePlace**  
Community Service Center and Permanent Housing Project in downtown Olympia will provide 4 units of permanent supportive housing and administrative offices for victims of domestic and/or sexual violence and their children.

❖ **OBJECTIVE 2 – Expand the Supply of Affordable Housing Units**

Housing strategy: Develop 200 Affordable Housing Units (137 units to be completed by 2013)

- ***Mercy Housing***  
Senior Housing Project in Olympia – 50 units  
Activity: Section 202 mix-use housing project in the downtown
- ***Housing Authority of Thurston County***  
Littlerock Road Housing Project in Littlerock – 32 units  
Activity: Acquire 1.75 acres to construct a 32-unit (2 and 3 bedrooms-four buildings) rental housing complex that targets 6 units to homeless families /children, 5 to family members w/ disabilities, and 5 that will serve veterans. The remaining 16 are targeted toward workforce housing households.
- ***Community Action Council of Lewis, Mason and Thurston Counties***  
Salmon Run Apartments Project in Yelm – 40 units  
Activity: Develop 40 low and very-low income rental housing units.
- ***South Puget Sound Habitat for Humanity***  
Shepherd's Grove Cottage Community – 5 units  
Activity: Develop 5 units of owner-occupied housing for low income homeowners.
- ***South Puget Sound Habitat for Humanity***  
Affordable Housing Cottage Community in Tumwater – 10 units  
Activity: Develop 10 units of owner-occupied housing for low income homeowners.

❖ **OBJECTIVE 3 – Expand the Supply of Rental Assistance**

Housing Strategy: Provide rental assistance for 340 homeless and at-risk households (340 new vouchers issued in 2010). Provide on-going annual evaluation of community rental assistance needs to determine the amount of new vouchers needed each year.

- ***Community Youth Services***  
Echo Transitional Housing Project – Olympia  
Activity: 18 vouchers for young adults (ages 18-24) who are exiting the state correctional system, or are pregnant or parenting, or are adjudicated sex offenders.
- ***Housing Authority***  
Activity: 50 housing vouchers for families with children (Foster Care)
- ***Family Support Center***  
Activity: 30 housing vouchers for families with children
- ***Thurston County Homeless Prevention and Rapid Re-housing Program***  
Activity: Salvation Army – 80 household vouchers for prevention  
Activity: Salvation Army – 32 household vouchers for Rapid Re-housing  
Activity: Community Action Council, Lewis, Mason and Thurston Counties – 43 household vouchers for prevention  
Activity: Community Youth Services – 23 vouchers for youth for Rapid Re-housing  
Activity: Family Support Services – 49 family vouchers for prevention and 15 family vouchers for Rapid Re-Housing



❖ **OBJECTIVE 4 – Preserve Existing Subsidized and Low-Income Housing**

Housing Strategy: Preservation of Section 8 Housing Units

- **Community Action Council of Lewis, Mason and Thurston Counties**  
Killion Court in Yelm - Section 8 Apartments  
Activity: Acquisition and substantial rehabilitation of 20 affordable senior housing apartments.
- **Low Income Housing Institute**  
Magnolia Villa Apartments  
Activity: Substantial rehabilitation of 21 subsidized units.

Housing Strategy: Preservation of Affordable Housing Units

- **Community Action Council of Lewis, Mason and Thurston Counties**  
Tenino Housing Rehabilitation Project  
Activity: Rehabilitation of 10 owner-occupied single-family houses.
- **Housing Authority of Thurston County**  
Thurston County Housing Rehabilitation Project  
Activity: Rehabilitation of 8 (minimum) owner-occupied single-family houses in Bucoda, Rainier, Tenino, Yelm, and the unincorporated county.

❖ **OBJECTIVE 5 – Consolidate Homeless Resources and Improve Service Delivery**

Planning Strategy: Coordinating homeless services, resources, funding, and marketing

- Activity: Expand community capacity to more effectively coordinate homeless housing resources and services with housing and service providers.
- Activity: Create a leadership and accountability structure for implementing the Ten-Year Homeless Housing Plan.
- Activity: Create organizational linkages and partnerships with service providers.
- Activity: Co-sponsor the Homeless Veterans Stand Down Event.
- Activity: Develop a public awareness and media strategy.

❖ **OBJECTIVE 6 – Maximize Housing Funding Opportunities**

Housing Strategy: Streamlining and strategically target housing funds

- Activity: Develop policy/needs-based Request for Proposals funding system that distributes the county's housing funds based on county housing needs.
- Activity: Link projects to the most appropriate funding source.
- Activity: Strategically allocate homeless funding to support the ten-year homeless goals.
- Activity: Develop a policy and long-term plan for funding essential housing programs.
- Activity: Develop new and flexible private funding resources.

❖ **OBJECTIVE 7 – Enhance Supportive Housing Services and Prevention**

Housing Strategy: Improve access to rental assistance and other support services

- Activity: Develop a comprehensive resource and service guide.
- Activity: Increase employment education and training opportunities.

Housing Strategy: Integrate Health Care with Housing

- Activity: Continue building successful service delivery models that evidence best practices
- Activity: Continue availability of behavioral health services
- Activity: Continue accessing child and family services

Prevention Strategy: Provide Resources and Support to Prevent Homelessness

- Activity: Create a Housing First Program.
- Activity: Develop a Homeless Prevention Services Program for Veterans
- Activity: Provide operational and maintenance (O&M) support for housing services.
- Activity: Develop a landlord retention plan.

❖ **OBJECTIVE 8 – Establishing a Coordinated System for Discharging Clients Leaving Jail and Treatment Facilities**

Housing Strategy: Increase collaboration between discharging institutions and service providers

- Activity: Improve communications and coordination with institutions to identify at-risk clients who may be homeless.
- Activity: Develop a housing step-up plan.

❖ **OBJECTIVE 9 – Conduct Adequate Data Collection and Planning to Efficiently Manage Limited Resources for Homelessness**

Planning Strategy: Improve HMIS reporting

- Activity: Consolidation of program and financial data to improve consistency and accuracy in report data.
- Activity: Train new service providers
- Activity: Create a standardized client assessment form.

❖ **OBJECTIVE 10 – Change Policy, Law and Legislation Where Necessary**

Planning Strategy: Reduce homeless and affordable housing development costs

- Activity: Identify county intra-jurisdictional Barriers

# APPENDIX F—2012 Point in Time Survey Form

## 2012 Point in Time Count of Homeless Persons

January 2012

Victims of DV and households with an individual with HIV/AIDS: do not provide name, birth month or birth day

ONE FORM PER HOUSEHOLD

Batch Site/Program Name \_\_\_\_\_

Location: Where did you stay last night? (choose one - applies to entire household)	
<input type="radio"/> Out of Doors (street, tent, etc)	<input type="radio"/> Emergency Shelter/Motel Voucher Program (program name: _____)
<input type="radio"/> Vehicle (car, travel trailer, etc)	<input type="radio"/> Homeless Transitional Housing Program (program name: _____)
<input type="radio"/> Abandoned Building	<input type="radio"/> Permanent Supportive Housing Program* (program name: _____)
<input type="radio"/> Temp. Living w/ Family or Friends*	<input type="radio"/> (Currently in Jail)*
<input type="radio"/> (Currently in Hosp/Detox/Other facility)*	*Indicates not considered homeless for PIT by HUD; Optional

City/Town: \_\_\_\_\_

Have you been continuously homeless for a year or more? ☐ Yes ☐ No

How many episodes of homelessness have you had in the past three (3) years? ☐ Less than 4 ☐ At least 4

Is anyone in your family a victim of domestic violence? (If yes, leave name columns below blank) ☐ Yes ☐ No

Household Information (Please enter each HH member below. Use additional forms if needed.)												
How many people are in your household? Adults: _____ Children: _____						Disabilities						
Last Known Permanent City _____ ZIP _____						Check <b>all</b> that apply to each client or "None Apply"						
Relation to Head of Household (if applicable) Spouse/Partner/Child/Etc.	First Name	Last Name	Birth Date (or if DOB refused; Year of Birth)	Gender	Veteran (Y/N) (served in Armed Forces)	NONE APPLY	Chronic Substance Abuse	Physical Disability (Permanent)	Developmental Disability	Mental Health (Substantial & Long-Term)	Chronic Health Condition (Permanently Disabling)	HIV/AIDS (don't include names)
Self												

Circumstances that Caused Your Homelessness (check all that apply)			
<input type="checkbox"/> Alcohol/Substance Abuse	<input type="checkbox"/> Primarily Economic Reasons	<input type="checkbox"/> Displacement/lost temp. living sit.	<input type="checkbox"/> Language Barrier
<input type="checkbox"/> Domestic Violence	<input type="checkbox"/> Job Loss	<input type="checkbox"/> Aged out of Foster Care	<input type="checkbox"/> Out of Home Youth
<input type="checkbox"/> Mental Illness	<input type="checkbox"/> Eviction	<input type="checkbox"/> Discharged from an Institution	<input type="checkbox"/> Transient on the Road
<input type="checkbox"/> Family Crisis/Break-up	<input type="checkbox"/> Lack of Childcare	<input type="checkbox"/> Lack of Job Skills	<input type="checkbox"/> Don't Know
<input type="checkbox"/> Illness/Health Problems	<input type="checkbox"/> Medical Costs	<input type="checkbox"/> Conviction (misdemeanor/felony)	<input type="checkbox"/> Refused

Source(s) of Household Income and Benefits (check all that apply)		
<input type="checkbox"/> None	<input type="checkbox"/> Public Assistance	<input type="checkbox"/> Farm/Other Migrant Agricultural Work
<input type="checkbox"/> Veterans Administration Benefits	<input type="checkbox"/> L&I/Workers' Compensation	<input type="checkbox"/> Relatives, Partners or Friends
<input type="checkbox"/> Unemployment Insurance	<input type="checkbox"/> Part-time Work	<input type="checkbox"/> Don't Know
<input type="checkbox"/> Social Security	<input type="checkbox"/> Employed Full-time at Low-wage Job	<input type="checkbox"/> Refused

I agree to the inclusion of my household's information for count purposes described in the release on the back of this form.

Signature(s) (each adult or unaccompanied youth must sign): \_\_\_\_\_

## Client Release of Information

### Washington State HMIS for Annual Point in Time Count

Data for this point in time count is entered into the Washington State Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) which collects information, over time, about the characteristics and service needs of men, women, and children experiencing homelessness.

To provide the most effective services in moving people from homelessness to permanent housing, we need an accurate count of all people experiencing homelessness in Washington State. In order to make sure that clients are not counted twice if services are received by more than one agency, we need to collect some personal information. Specifically, we need: **name and birth date**. Your information will be stored in our database for 7 years.

- We will guard this information with strict security policies to protect your privacy. Our computer system is highly secure and uses up-to-date protection features such as data encryption, passwords, and identity checks required for each system user. There is a small risk of a security breach, and someone might obtain and use your information inappropriately. If you ever suspect the data in HMIS has been misused, immediately contact the HMIS System Administrator at (360) 725-3028.
- The data you provide will be combined with data from the Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) for the purpose of further analysis. Your name and other identifying information will not be included in any reports or publications. Only a limited few staff members in the research division who have signed confidentiality agreements will be able to see this information.
- Your decision to participate in the HMIS will not affect the quality or quantity of services you are eligible to receive from any service provider, and will not be used to deny outreach, shelter or housing. However, if you do choose to participate, services in the region may improve if we have accurate information about homeless individuals and the services they need.

**By signing the front page of this form** you are consenting to the inclusion of your household information in HMIS and authorize information collected to be shared with partner agencies. Your personal information will not be made public and will only be used with strict confidentiality. You may withdraw your consent at any time.

**Thank you for helping us improve services to homeless persons.**

#### INSTRUCTIONS FOR SURVEYORS

**All information in the survey is required.** Forms will not be used if *location, gender or year of birth* is missing. If someone refuses to answer questions for the survey, please make sure to fill in at least these three fields for them. If you do not know the exact birth year of a household member, guesses are OK.

**\*\*Important:** DO NOT provide name, birth day, or birth month for households with an individual who is: 1) in a DV agency; 2) currently fleeing or in danger from a domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault or stalking situation; 3) has HIV/AIDS or 4) anyone you do not have written informed consent from (signature on first page). \*\* However, a signature is not needed to collect other information. All homeless households and individuals should have a form filled out.

**The purpose of this survey** is to help with the planning of providing services and housing to homeless individuals and to identify the types of assistance needed. It is also a requirement to receive funding from HUD and the WA State Dept. of Commerce.

**Disabilities:** Please make sure to record applicable disabilities for each household member. If a household member has no disabilities please select NONE APPLY. If the disability section is blank we will assume the question wasn't asked or the client refused to answer.

**Shelter Programs:** If surveys are being collected at a shelter program (emergency, transitional or permanent supportive) please make sure to write somewhere on the form the name of the shelter program and batch them together when submitting to lead PIT agency.

Individuals and families in **Permanent Supportive Housing** programs are not required to fill out a complete survey. However, each agency will be required to submit to Commerce the number of clients staying in their programs on the night of the count. This survey is a great tool for that tally.

**All homeless persons should complete this survey.** "Homeless" means persons who, on one particular day or night, do not have a decent and safe shelter or sufficient funds to purchase a place to stay. People living in a dwelling lacking any of the following should be considered homeless (check "living out of doors"): ability to cook hot food, drinking water, restroom, heat, or ability to bathe (this includes "Tent Cities"). People living in emergency shelters (including motel vouchers) and transitional housing are considered homeless. (For the purposes of this survey, transitional housing refers to housing with a 2 year stay limit where being homeless is a prerequisite for eligibility and case management services are required as part of the program.) People living temporarily with family or friends due to loss of housing, economic hardship, or a similar reason (often referred to as "doubled-up" or "couch surfing") should complete the survey, although it is not required. Individuals in Jail will not be counted as homeless; therefore counties are not expected to count this population.

**Each member of a household** should be listed in the Household Information section. **A single person is considered a household** (i.e., "a household consisting of one person"), so **single individuals should complete the Household Information section.**

If you have any questions about how to fill out this survey or how this data will be used, please don't hesitate to call Commerce at (360) 725-3028.



## APPENDIX G —GLOSSARY OF HOUSING & HOMELESS PROGRAM TERMS

*[Adapted from Pierce County Affordable Housing Consortium website ([affordablehousingconsortium.org](http://affordablehousingconsortium.org)),  
which was adapted from HDC, Seattle]*

<b>Affordable Housing</b>	Housing should cost no more than 30% of your total income, including utilities. Affordable rental housing usually has a maximum income limit of 60% of median income. In Thurston County, this equates to an annual income of \$29,580 for one person or \$38,040 for three persons. Homeownership programs generally allow up to 80% of median or \$39,400 for one person or \$50,700 for a three-person household.
<b>Chronically Homeless</b>	Chronically homeless people are defined as "an unaccompanied homeless individual with a disabling condition who have either been continuously homeless for a year or more, or have had at least four episodes of homelessness in the past three years.
<b>HUD</b>	Abbreviation for the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.
<b>HOME Consortium</b>	The HOME Consortium is the Thurston County inter-jurisdictional body that governs the use of federal HOME funds and the two state funded programs called the Homeless Housing Program and the Affordable Housing Program. This eight member body is composed of one appointed representative from each jurisdiction in Thurston County, including Bucoda, Lacey, Olympia, Rainier, Tenino, Tumwater, Yelm and Thurston County.
<b>HOME Citizens Advisory Committee</b>	The HOME Citizens Advisory Committee is a committee established by the HOME Consortium composed of appointed members who represent service providers, non-profit housing developers, private sector housing industry, faith-based communities, homeless people and other stakeholders in local homeless and affordable housing policy and funding issues.
<b>Homeless</b>	<p>The <b>federal definition</b> of homelessness, which comes from United States Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). HUD defines homeless as (1) an individual who lacks a fixed, regular and adequate nighttime residence; and (2) an individual who has a primary nighttime residence that is:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• A supervised publicly or privately operated shelter designed to provide temporary living accommodations (including welfare hotels, congregate shelters, and transitional housing for the mentally ill).</li><li>• An institution that provides a temporary residence for individuals intended to be institutionalized; or a public or private place not designed for, or ordinarily used as, a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings</li></ul>
<b>Homeless Coordinator</b>	Newly created Thurston County one-year position funded to provide strategic coordination to the countywide network of service, shelter, and housing providers. Key goals for the Homeless Coordinator include; 1) Assessment of the Current System, 2) Ten-Year Plan Update, 3) Enhanced Data Management, and, 4) Implementation of a Revised Ten-Year Plan
<b>Housing Authority</b>	Housing authorities are public corporations with boards appointed by the local government. Their mission is to provide affordable housing to low- and moderate-income people. In addition to public housing, housing authorities also provide other types of subsidized housing such as the federal HUD-subsidized Section 8 program.

<b>Housing First</b>	Housing First is a recent innovation in human service programs and social policy in responding to homelessness. It is an alternative to the a system of emergency shelter/transitional housing progressions known as the Continuum of Care, whereby each level moves them closer to "independent housing" (for example: from the streets to a public shelter, and from a public shelter to a transitional housing program, and from there to their own apartment in the community) Housing First moves the homeless individual or household immediately from the streets or homeless shelters into their own apartments.
<b>Housing Task Force</b>	The Housing Task Force is an ad hoc association formed in 1988 to address issues of affordable housing and homelessness in Thurston County. It was originally composed of service providers, advocates, government housing program staff and elected officials and served as an networking and advocacy group to promote local housing policy. In recent years it has become a coalition of homeless shelter, housing and service providers who meet monthly to network homeless services and address current issues.
<b>Income Limits</b>	Income limits for households to qualify for subsidized housing opportunities are based on the Area Median Income (AMI) for a family of four. In Thurston County the 2010 AMI is \$68,100. Specific household sizes are used to determine eligibility for each household. Low-income: 80% or less of AMI = \$56,300 for household of 4 Very-low-income: 50% or less of AMI = \$35,200 for household of 4 Extremely-low-income: 30% or less of AMI = \$21,100 for household of 4
<b>Low Income Housing Tax Credit</b>	Government authorized tax credits issued to both for-profit and nonprofit-developed rental properties to develop affordable housing. The Washington State Housing Finance Commission allocates these credits to developers to build or fix up low-income housing. Large corporations, institutions, pension funds, and insurance companies invest in the housing as a method to gain the tax credits and reduce their income tax obligations. These apartments must serve residents below 60% of median income and must accept Section 8 vouchers.
<b>Market Rate Rent</b>	The prevailing monthly cost for rental housing, also called "street rents". It is set by the landlord without restrictions.
<b>Median Income</b>	This is a statistical number set at the level where half of all households have income above it and half below it. The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development Regional Economist calculates and publishes this median income data annually in the Federal Register. See the Washington State Median Income and Income Limit figures for 2009-2010, at <a href="http://www.huduser.org/portal/datasets/il/il2009/st.odb">http://www.huduser.org/portal/datasets/il/il2009/st.odb</a>
<b>Mixed-Income Housing</b>	A multi-family housing property that contains both market-rate units and subsidized units for low income residents.
<b>Nonprofit Housing</b>	Nonprofit housing is developed by nonprofit corporations with a community board of directors and mission. Most housing developed by nonprofit developers is affordable with rents or prices below market-rate. Income generated from the housing is put back into the mission of the organization, rather than being distributed to stockholders or individual investors.
<b>Nonprofit Housing Developer</b>	A nonprofit organization with a mission that involves the creation, preservation, renovation, operation or maintenance of affordable housing.
<b>Overflow Shelters</b>	Overflow shelters are informal emergency shelters operated by non-profit organizations or faith communities inside their facilities to accommodate the "overflow" of homeless people who are

turned away from traditional emergency shelters. Typically, overflow shelters rotate on a cyclical basis in order to be compliant with local zoning and building codes. Staffing is typically offered by trained volunteers.

**Permanent Housing**

Rental apartments or ownership homes that provide individuals and families with a fixed street address and residence.

**Privately Developed or For-Profit Housing**

This housing rents or sells at market-rate and is developed and owned by for-profit individuals, partnerships, or corporations. Most housing in Thurston County is privately developed.

**Project-Based Section 8 Housing**

A federal HUD program initially based on 20-year commitments of rent subsidy to developers of privately owned rental housing stock in the community to encourage them to build affordable housing.

Many Section 8 contracts have expired or will expire soon, and the property owners must now decide whether to renew their contract or leave the program ("opt out"). Most of these contracts are now renewed on a one-year basis. Projects with high risk of opting out typically have rents set by the Section 8 contract below the prevailing market rents for comparable units. Owners thus have an incentive to leave the program and convert their property to private market rentals.

**Public Housing**

Public housing is housing owned and run by a local housing authority under the oldest federal housing program—the Housing Act of 1937. To be eligible to live in public housing, you must be low income and meet certain other requirements. In most cases, rent including utilities can comprise no more than 30% of your income.

**Rapid Re-housing**

Rapid Re-housing is a new housing program model based on the "housing first" approach. Rapid Re-housing differs from other housing models by having an immediate and primary focus on helping families access and sustain permanent housing as quickly as possible. Rapid Re-housing is funded by a new HUD initiative called "Homelessness Prevention and Rapid Re-Housing Program (HPRP)".

**Section 8 Vouchers**

This federal HUD program that is administered by the local Housing Authority of Thurston County. Eligible tenants receive vouchers they can use to help them pay for apartments in the private market. Vouchers pay that portion of the low income tenants rent that is above 30% of their monthly income.

**Shelters**

Also called emergency shelters, provides temporary overnight living accommodations for homeless people. Shelters are typically dedicated to specific populations, i.e. single males, families or domestic violence victims. Shelters are operated by both non-profit organizations or faith communities, with each shelter being administered under a unique set of rules. Generally, shelter guests must leave the facility during the day.

**SRO**

Single room occupancy units. The traditional SRO unit is a single room, usually less than 100 square feet, designed to accommodate one person. Amenities such as a bathroom, kitchen or common areas are located outside the unit and are shared with other residents. Many SROs can be found in renovated hotels. SRO housing serves a variety of people by providing three types of settings: 1) Emergency housing for homeless people, including the elderly. Occupancy is usually on a nightly or weekly basis. 2) Transitional housing for previously homeless or marginally housed persons, including older people, who are progressing to permanent housing. 3) Permanent housing for older people who will move to this setting and often live here until their death or until their increasing frailty forces them to move to a more supportive setting.

<b>Subsidized Housing</b>	A generic term covering all federal, state or local government programs that reduce the cost of housing for low- and moderate-income residents. Housing can be subsidized in numerous ways—giving tenants a rent voucher, helping homebuyers with down payment assistance, reducing the interest on a mortgage, providing deferred loans to help developers acquire and develop property, giving tax credits to encourage investment in low- and moderate-income housing, authorizing tax-exempt bond authority to finance the housing, providing ongoing assistance to reduce the operating costs of housing, and others.
<b>Supportive Housing</b>	Combines affordable housing with individualized health, counseling and employment services for persons with mental illness, chemical dependency, chronic health problems, or other challenges. Generally it is transitional housing, but it can be permanent housing in cases such as a group home for persons with mental illness or developmental disabilities. Supportive housing is a solution to homelessness because it addresses its root causes by providing a proven, effective means of re-integrating families and individuals into the community by addressing their basic needs for housing and on-going support.
<b>Transitional Housing</b>	This housing provides stability for residents for a limited time period, usually two weeks to 24 months, to allow them to recover from a crisis such as homelessness or domestic violence before transitioning into permanent housing. Transitional housing often offers supportive services, which enable a person to transition to an independent living situation.
<b>Tent City</b>	<p>“Tent City” is a newly minted term for a long standing practice where homeless people develop informal communities composed of tents and other temporary structures. During the Great Depression, these communities were derisively termed, “Hoovervilles” after then President Hoover in a negative reference to the failed federal efforts to revive the economy.</p> <p>Present day tent cities are often created by homeless people for needed shelter on public or under-utilized lands. Sometimes tent cities are created by homeless advocates as a form of protest. In recent years, local governments have struggled to find ways to balance regulatory compliance with the need for shelter and community provided by Tent Cities..</p>

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**Questions, comments, or to request a digital copy of the FINAL report that will include material from the 2012 Annual Homeless Forum please contact:**

**Anna Schlecht**, Thurston County Homeless Census Coordinator

City of Olympia Housing Program Manager

(360) 753-8183, [aschlech@ci.olympia.wa.us](mailto:aschlech@ci.olympia.wa.us)