

*EVERYONE COUNTS!*



## Whatcom County Homeless Count

A POINT-IN-TIME CENSUS OF HOMELESS RESIDENTS

April 2010

**Sponsored by:**

**Whatcom County Health Department**

**Whatcom County Homeless Coalition**

**Whatcom Homeless Service Center**

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# Executive Summary

## Homelessness in Whatcom County

At any point in time, at least 1,334 people in Whatcom County are homeless. Throughout the year, hundreds more face the prospect of losing their homes due to precarious financial conditions, domestic violence, health crises, and chronic mental health and chemical dependency conditions. People being released from psychiatric hospitalization and incarceration face challenging community re-entry issues. Furthermore, the rising cost of housing and stagnant wages increases the risk of people losing their housing, and makes it increasingly difficult to find affordable housing.

## The 2010 homeless count

This year more than 40 agencies participated in the homeless count, which occurred on January 28. As you read this report, please keep in mind that point-in-time counts generally underestimate the number of those who are homeless because:

- A point-in-time is just a “snapshot” and may not capture all those who are cycling in and out of homelessness over the course of a year.
- It is difficult to find where all the unsheltered people reside. It is impossible to know all the places that might provide unconventional shelter (i.e. tents, abandoned cars) for one night.

## How many are homeless?

This year we counted:

- 1,334 homeless persons (a *person* may be part of a family household, or an unaccompanied individual)
- 905 homeless households (a *household* may include one or more persons)

## Who are the people experiencing homeless?

The 2010 homeless population is as diverse as the larger community population: they are old and young, male and female, unaccompanied individuals, and families. Of those counted this year:

- 42% of homeless households include only one person
- There were 266 families with children; the median<sup>1</sup> family size is 3 persons In terms of age and sex:
- 46% of all homeless persons are female
- Ages ranged from less than one year old to 83 years old
- Median age of all homeless persons is 20 years
- Median age of unaccompanied homeless persons is 34 years

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<sup>1</sup> The median value is, essentially, the midpoint. Specifically, in a group of measurements (e.g. family size, age) arranged from lowest to highest, the median is the middle value if the number of measurements is odd. If the number of measurements is even, the median is the average of the two middle values.

## Homeless youth

Homelessness among youth may result from family problems, economic problems, and residential instability. Some youth become homeless with their families, others leave home after years of physical and sexual abuse, strained relationships, parental neglect, addiction of a family member, or their own chemical addiction.

- 515 persons under 18 years old were counted, or 39% of all homeless persons
- 20% of all homeless persons are less than 10 years old
- 230 persons counted are 16 to 21 years old
- 308 persons are 16 to 24 years old
- At least 55 homeless youth (age 0-17) are unaccompanied

## Community re-entry

Homeless Count survey respondents were asked if they had been discharged from an institution within the last six months. Altogether, 125 said they had been released from jail, inpatient substance abuse, mental health treatment, or juvenile detention.

- 9% had been released from jail (N=81)
- 3% had been released from inpatient substance abuse treatment (N=26)
- 3% had been released from a psychiatric hospital (N=24)
- 1% had been released from juvenile detention (N=10)

## Shelter

Homeless survey respondents told us where they slept the previous night:

- 38% temporarily living with family or friends (N=346)
- 21% in transitional housing (N=190)
- 12% in emergency shelter (N=108)
- 9% out of doors (N=85)
- 1% in a motel (using a voucher) (N=12)
- 7% in a vehicle (N=63)
- 2% in jail (N=16)
- <1% in an abandoned building (N=6)

## Chronic homelessness

Based on HUD's definition of chronic homelessness, **85 persons, or 9%** of all homeless households are chronically homeless (Table 3). This is certainly an undercount since many survey respondents did not supply enough information to determine whether or not they met all of the HUD chronic homelessness characteristics. Nevertheless, it is a significant decrease from 2008 when 158 chronically homeless persons were counted.<sup>2</sup> To be considered chronically homeless based on HUD's definition, a person must be an unaccompanied individual who has been homeless for 12 months or more OR has had more than three episodes of homelessness in the last three years, AND has been sleeping in a place not meant for human habitation OR in emergency shelter, AND has one of the following disabling conditions (mental disorder, substance abuse disorder, permanent physical or developmental disability).

<sup>2</sup> Due to a counting error in 2008, the published report that year reported that only 113 persons were considered to be chronically homeless by HUD's definition; however, only unsheltered persons were included in that calculation. Instead, we should have also included persons in emergency shelter who also meet the other criteria. The correct number of chronically homeless persons in 2008 is actually 158.

The number (and percent) of counted households with any of the HUD chronic homelessness characteristics include:

- 291 (32%) have been homeless for 12 months or more
- 147 (16%) have had four or more episodes of homelessness in the last three years
- 334 (37%) households have a person with a disabling condition
- 261 (29%) sleeping in a place not meant for human habitation and/or in emergency shelter
- 153 (17%) were unsheltered

### Top reasons for homelessness

Homelessness results from a complex set of circumstances that require people to choose between food, shelter and other needs. In fact 30% of respondents to this year's homeless count reported three or more reasons for their homelessness. Alcohol or drug abuse top the list of reasons; one in three (33%) report substance abuse as a reason for their homelessness. Also high on the list are economic factors including job loss (31%) and inability to pay for housing (29%).

- 33% Alcohol or drug abuse
- 31% Lost job
- 29% Unable to pay rent or mortgage
- 25% Family break-up
- 21% Mental illness
- 19% Victim of domestic violence
- 18% Medical problems
- 15% Temporary living situation ended
- 14% Convicted of a felony
- 13% Poor credit rating
- 10% Lack of job skills
- 7% Discharged from an institution

### Comparisons to 2009

Compared to 2009, the number of households increased from 880 to 905 this year. However, Homeless Count partners counted a similar total number of homeless persons this year. The number of homeless persons increased slightly, from 1,328 to 1,334. It is worth noting here that Count partner agencies exerted a higher level of effort in 2010 as in past years. These additional efforts included enlisting the help of more volunteers and including additional sites (e.g. clean and sober housing, Lummi Ventures project). Also, outreach to youth and young adults this year is unprecedented and it no doubt is the reason that the number of young adults (aged 16-24) increased substantially compared to 2009. This is also reflected in the median age which decreased from 24 years old in 2009 to 20 years old in 2010.

Other changes evident in the data compared to 2009 is the substantial decrease in the number of people counted who are chronically homeless. The apparent trend in the reduction of chronic homelessness – a 46% decrease since 2008 – is possibly associated with the significant investments our community has made in permanent supportive housing, which were greatly increased in 2008 through the creation of the Whatcom Homeless Service Center and City Gate Apartment programs. We also observed a substantial decrease in the number of homeless people counted who had been recently released from jail or prison, another observation that is consistent with outcomes we should expect from these investments.

## Acknowledgements

Each year the Point-in-Time Count of those experiencing homelessness requires a sizeable investment of time and effort from service organizations and community volunteers.

This year we recruited Homeless Count Leads from members of the Coalition for the Homeless who stepped up and did remarkable work for which we are deeply grateful. We reached farther and deeper into the community so that we could get as accurate of a count as possible and at the same time broadened our understanding of the people we are counting and how they obtain resources.

Thank you to all who helped with this count with a special thank you to:

### Count Leads

- Don Galloway, Love INC., leading with the Faith Based providers.
- Northwest Youth Services, including Cori LeClair, Hannah Smith and their Executive Director, Riannon Bardsley, leading with the youth and street outreach focus.
- Lydia Place, including Jessica Haugen, Ashley Thomasson, and their Executive Director, Teresa Josephson for assisting with the youth and the street outreach.
- Opportunity Council--Anjali Englund and OC staff including supervisors Danae Armstrong, and Debbie Paton for leading with meal programs.
- Rainbow Center and its manager Joe Gibson, Robert Ables taking the lead.
- Readiness to Learn staff and Mary Jo Durburow for Bellingham School district.
- Lummi Ventures, Kathy Pierre, Tami Eastwood for leading with Lummi tribal outreach.
- Lighthouse Mission staff and Ron Buchinski, Executive Director.
- Hope House Outreach team, Theresa Meurs and Phil Corrigan and for taking the lead with other agency outreach workers.
- Stepping Stones, Pam Pearsall.
- Dept. of Corrections and Thad Allen for taking the lead with the re-entry population.
- Gary Williams for taking the lead with law enforcement, veterans, and parks.
- Westcoast Counseling and John Thelen for the Jail count.

### Count volunteers

- Carol Totten, Noriko Lao, Irene Morgan, Janet Morino, Kaye Miller, Sharon Camblin, Julie Pettigrew.
- Alicia Wurm from Salt on the Street and Bridgett Amonsens and First Baptist Church team
- And thanks to Jessa Farr and Katie Haverstock, Interns working for the Homeless Service Center who helped organize field operations and process survey data.

Finally, we would like to thank the homeless individuals and families who responded to this year's Count. Responding to the survey requires time and effort, but more importantly, it asks that each person share a part of their very personal story with the whole community. Without these stories, we know very little about the complexities of homelessness or how we, as a community, should respond.

## Introduction

At any point in time, at least 1,334 people in Whatcom County are homeless. Throughout the year, hundreds more face the prospect of losing their homes due to precarious financial conditions, domestic violence, health crises, and chronic mental health and chemical dependency conditions. People being released from psychiatric hospitalization and incarceration face challenging community re-entry issues. Furthermore, the current recession and associated rise in unemployment increases the risk of people losing their housing, and makes it increasingly difficult for people who become homeless to get back into a stable, permanent housing situation.

### The Point-in-Time Homeless Count

The Point-in-Time Count is a census of homeless persons. It is conducted over a very short period of time to reduce the chance of counting people twice. The Count is sponsored by the Whatcom County Homeless Coalition, Whatcom County Health Department, and the Whatcom Homeless Service Center. This year more than 40 agencies participated in the count, which occurred on January 28.

Homeless census data derived from this count is useful for characterizing the homeless population in our community. Knowing approximately how many families with children, unaccompanied youth, and unsheltered veterans – to use just a few subgroup examples – helps Homeless Coalition members plan for homeless services.

With the opening of the County's new Homeless Service Center and the City Gate Apartments re-entry program, the count is also being used as one measure of this program's impact on the community's collaborative efforts as described in the *10-Year Plan to End Homelessness*.

The Count is also required by Washington State and federal laws as a condition of receiving financial assistance to fund homeless services.

### Point-in-time count limitations

National research indicates that point-in-time counts generally underestimate the number of those who are homeless because:

- A point-in-time is just a "snapshot" and may not capture all those who are cycling in and out of homelessness over the course of a specific period of time (e.g. annually). Furthermore, an annual "snapshot" may miss any seasonal fluctuations that may occur in our communities.
- It is difficult to find where all the unsheltered people reside. It is impossible to know all the places that might provide unconventional shelter (i.e. tents, abandoned cars) for one night.

## Number of homeless individuals and families in Whatcom County

At a single point in time in late January 2010, a total of **1,334 persons** were homeless in Whatcom County. They are members of **905 households**. For the purpose of this homeless count, households are divided into two categories: *homeless individuals* and *homeless families*. Homeless individual households are unaccompanied single persons and homeless families are households that include more than one person (e.g. couples, single-parent or two-parent families with children).

This year, 42% of the homeless households were unaccompanied homeless individuals. Altogether, there were 559 unaccompanied homeless individuals, including 56 youth (age 12 – 17) and 503 adults (Table 1). Persons in homeless families totaled 775, including 446 youth (age 0-17)<sup>3</sup> and 329 adults. Persons in homeless families accounted for 58% of all homeless persons.

**Table 1 Homeless count by individual or family status and age group**

	Homeless Individuals			Homeless Families			Total
	Single adult	Single youth	Subtotal	Adult in family	Youth in family	Subtotal	
Total	503	56	<b>559</b>	329	446	<b>775</b>	<b>1,334</b>
% of Total	38%	4%	<b>42%</b>	25%	33%	<b>58%</b>	<b>100%</b>

## Characteristics of homeless persons and families

### Household size and family status

Of the 905 homeless households counted, 583 included no youth (age 0-17); 266 included families with children; an additional 56 are unaccompanied homeless youth (age 12-17) (Table 2). Among families with children, the household size ranged from two to six. We counted 591 persons in families with children, which is 44% of the total homeless population, this is higher than HUD reports nationally: 37% of all homeless persons are persons in families with children.

<sup>3</sup> Note that in previous years we used different age groups for youth in the unaccompanied homeless individual category (14-24) versus the homeless family category (0-17). This caused some confusion so in this general section of the report we use the same age range for “youth.” However, we report more extensive youth age groupings in the “Youth” section of this report.

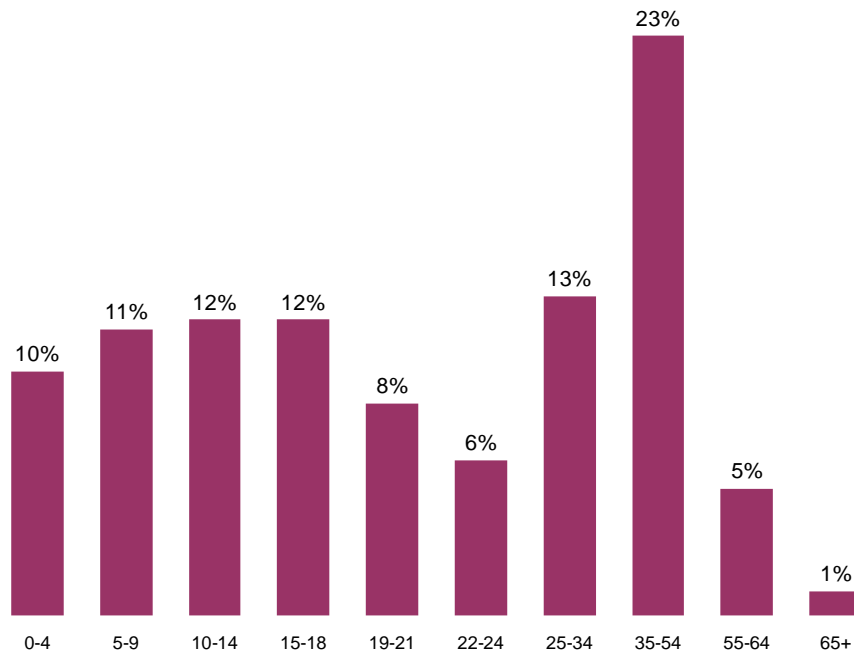
**Table 2 Household size and family status**

Household size (persons)	Households with no youth	Families with children (0-17)*	Unaccompanied youth (0-17)	Total
1	520	70	55	645
2	41	112		153
3	10	50		60
4	6	25		31
5	5	7		12
6	2	2		4
<b>Total</b>	<b>584</b>	<b>266</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>905</b>

\*Note that in the table above, 70 families with children are listed as having a household size of only one person. For these families, we had no information on the parents, so only the children were included in the Count.

**Age and sex**

Just under half (45%) of homeless persons counted are female. Ages ranged from less than one year old to 83 years old. The median age of all homeless persons was 20 years. The median age of unaccompanied homeless persons was 34 years.

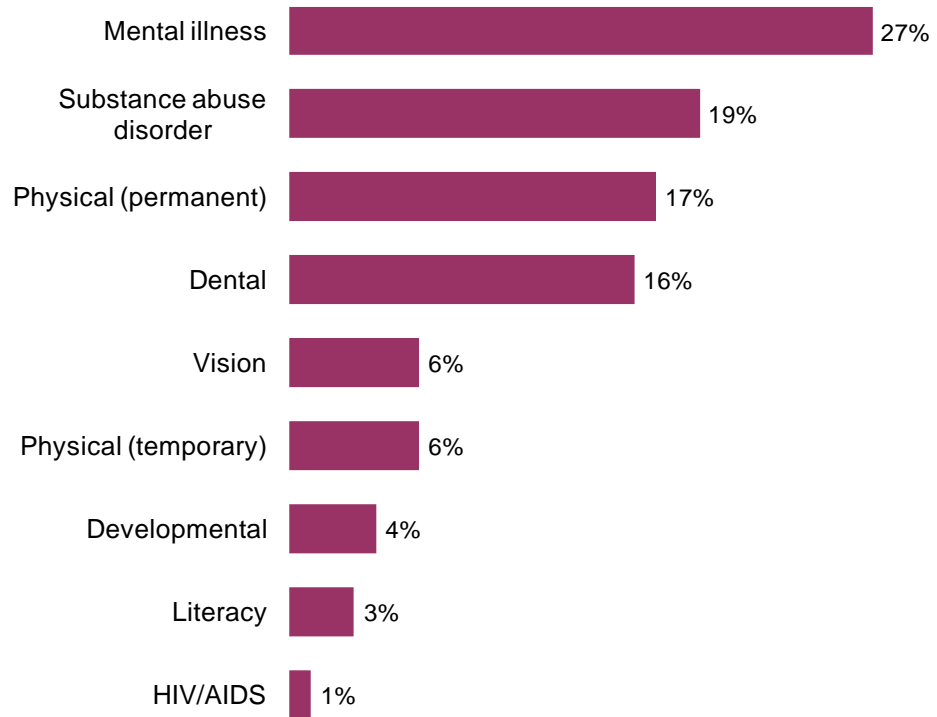


**Figure 1 Age distribution of homeless persons**

The 515 minors counted this year comprise 39% of the homeless population, with 267 children under 10 years old accounting for 20% of all homeless persons (Figure 1). Seniors, age 65 and older make up just 1% of the homeless population.

**Disabling conditions**

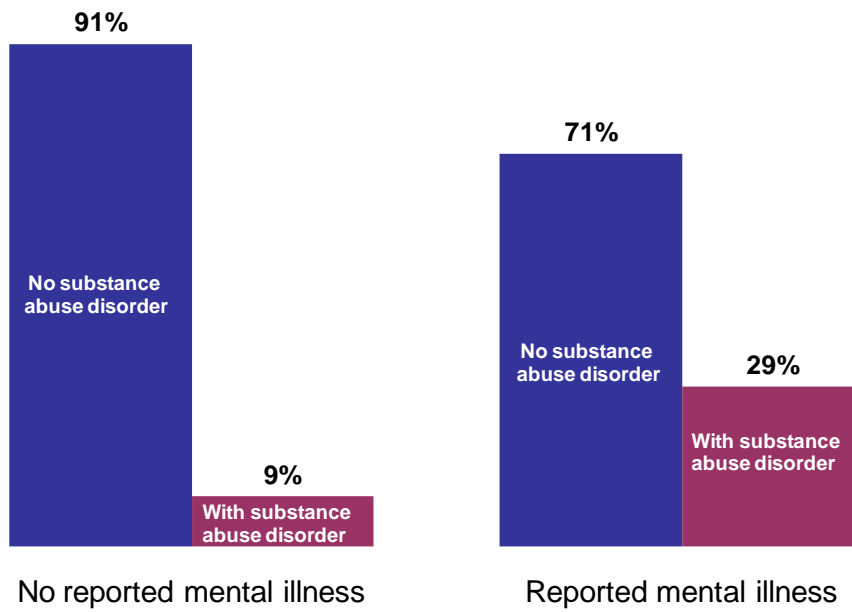
Homeless count survey respondents were asked to list which of ten disabilities applied to each member of their household. The most prevalent disabling conditions were mental illness (27%), substance abuse disorders (19%), permanent physical disabilities (17%), and dental problems (16%) (Figure 2).



*Figure 2 Homeless persons with disabling conditions*

Additional analyses show that a substantial number of homeless persons face the challenges of co-occurring disorders (Figure 3). Those who report a mental illness disability are three times as likely (29%) to also report a substance abuse disorder compared to those with no reported mental illness (9%).

**Homeless persons with mental illness are highly likely to have a co-occurring substance abuse disorder**



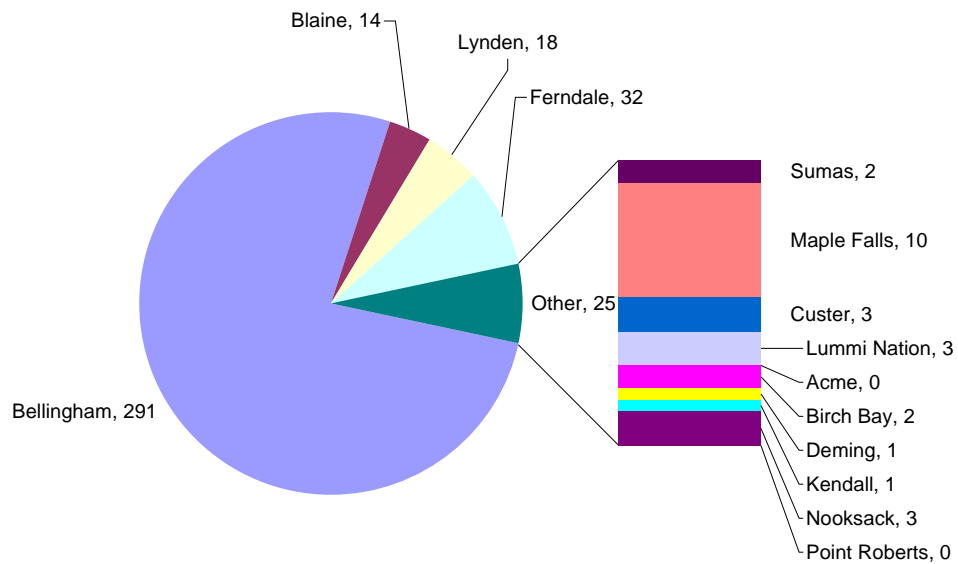
*Figure 3 Co-occurring mental illness and substance abuse disorder among homeless persons*

## Characteristics of homelessness in Whatcom County

66% of the counted homeless households had their last episode of stable housing in Whatcom County.

### Geographic distribution: location of previous residence

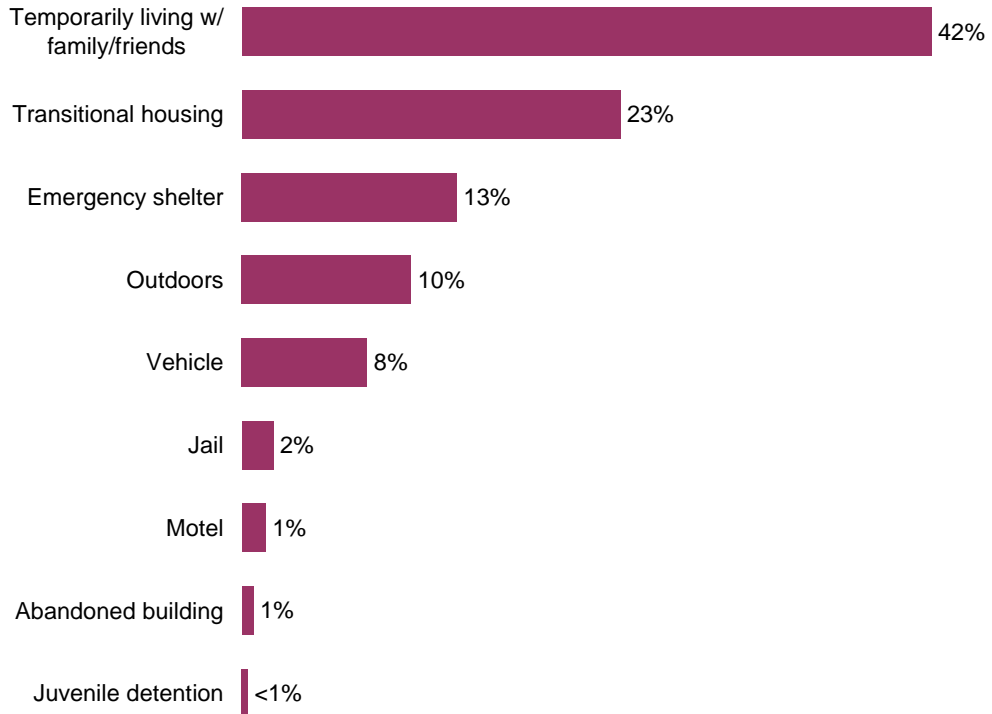
Respondents were asked to say where they last had stable housing for six months or more. Only 564 of the 880 households answered this question. Of those who answered, 30% listed a location outside Whatcom County. Of the 396 households that listed a Whatcom County location, 291 had last lived in stable housing in Bellingham (Figure 4). Ferndale (32), Blaine (14), and Lynden (18) were the next most frequently cited locations of last stable housing.



**Figure 4** Number of homeless households by location of previous residence (n=564)

### Sources of shelter

In 2010, homeless households found shelter primarily with other households (42%), in a transitional housing facility (23%) or an emergency shelter (13%) (Figure 5). Smaller proportions are housed temporarily in a motel (1%) as a form of emergency shelter. Homeless households are considered unsheltered if they spend their nights out of doors (10%), in a vehicle (8%) or in an abandoned building (1%). A few individuals had just been released for jail or juvenile detention.



*Figure 5 Source of shelter the night before the homeless count*

### Reasons for homelessness

Homelessness results from a complex set of circumstances that require people to choose between food, shelter and other needs. In fact 27% of respondents to this year’s homeless count reported three or more reasons for their homelessness. The top three factors people reported this year are alcohol or drug use (33%), loss of a job (31%), and inability to pay rent or mortgage (29%).

It is worth noting that this is the second year in a row that we have seen decreases in the percentage of homeless households reporting mental illness and discharged from an institution (e.g. jail, prison, psychiatric hospital) as reasons for their homelessness. The percentage who reported mental illness as a reason decreased from 30% in 2008 to 21% in 2010. Those who reported discharge from an institution as a reason decreased from 16% in 2008 to 7% in 2010.

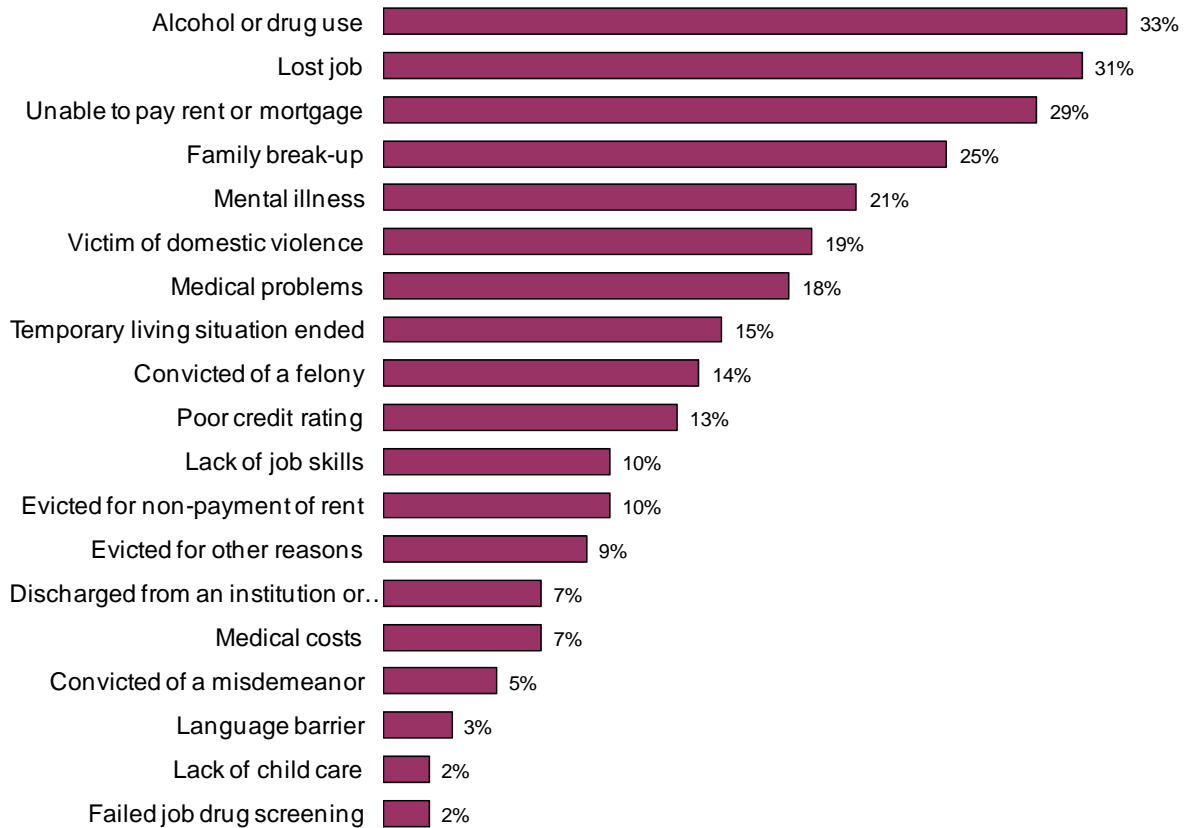
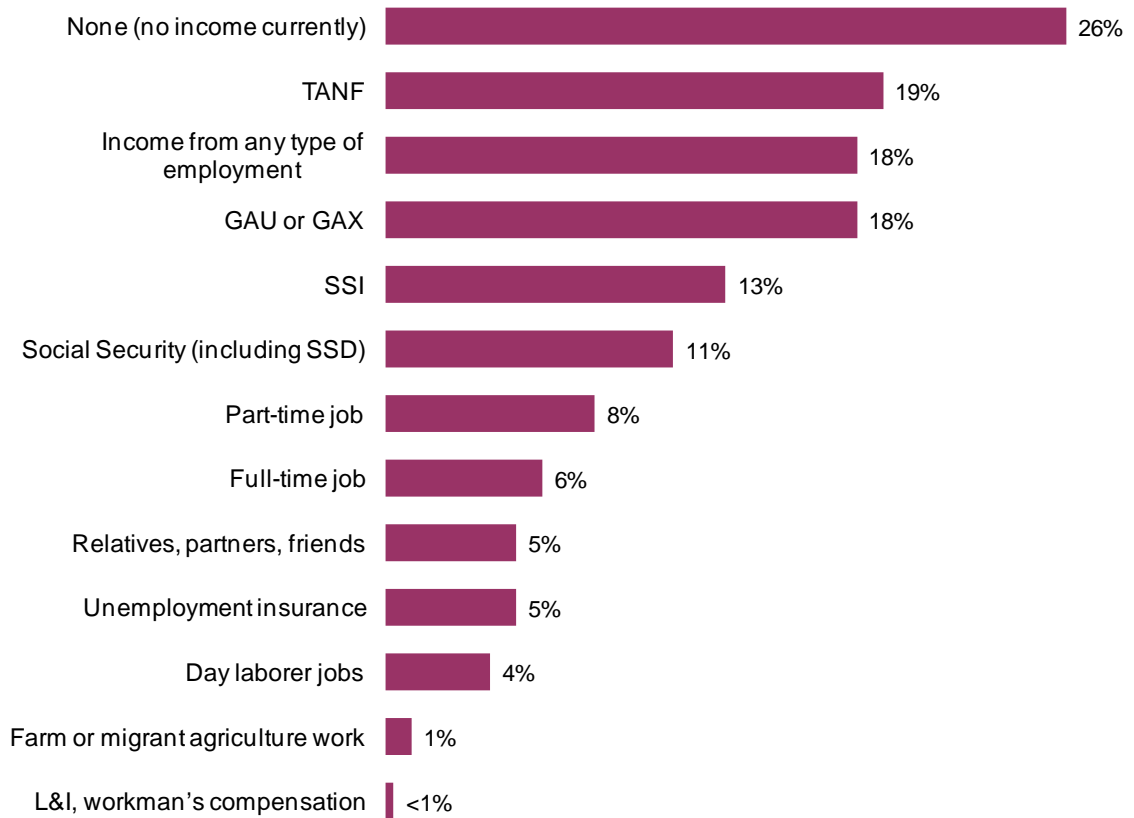


Figure 6 Reasons for homelessness (N=627 households)

**Sources of income**

The percentage of homeless households who reported income from any type of employment decreased from 25% in 2009 to 18% in 2010. Nearly one in four (23%) households report that they have no income at all (Figure 7). The most common sources of public assistance income for homeless households include: TANF (19%), General Assistance - GAU/GAX (18%), and SSI (13%).

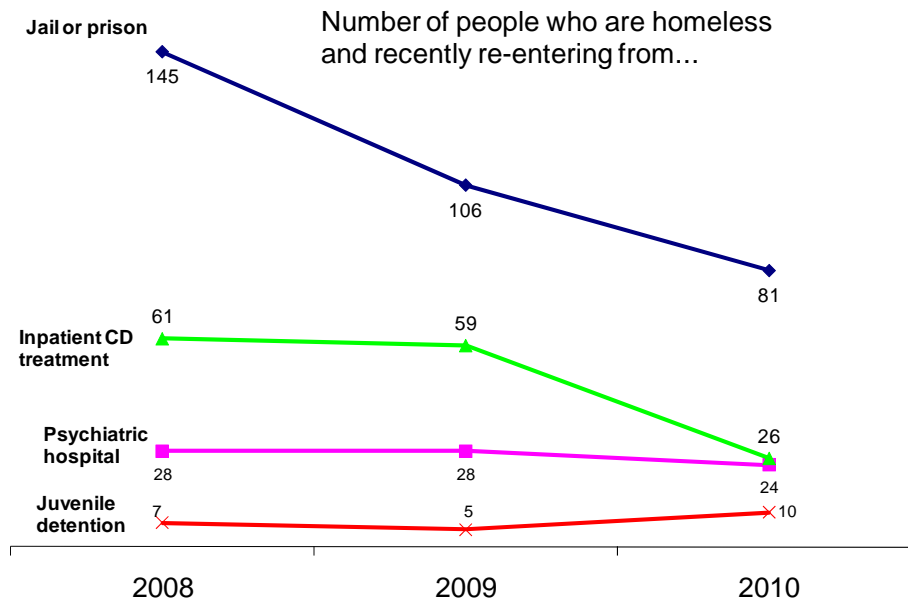


*Figure 7 Sources of household income (N=617 households)*

### Community re-entry

Homeless Count survey respondents were asked if they had recently re-entered the community after being discharged from a residential institution within the last six months. Altogether, 125 (or 14% of all homeless households) said someone in their household had recently re-entered the community after release from jail, inpatient substance abuse or mental health treatment, or from juvenile detention. This appears to be a downward trend in comparison to the previous two years.

The downward trend in the number of persons who are homeless and recently released from an institutional, residential setting is driven largely by decreases in the number of jail/prison and inpatient chemical dependency releases (Figure 8). People who are homeless and re-entering the community from incarceration has decreased from 145 in 2008 to 81 in 2010. It is quite likely that local investments in permanent housing assistance and supportive services to help people retain housing is partly responsible for these positive trends. For example, City Gate Apartments is a permanent supportive housing program that added 37 units of housing for people who are re-entering from jail and prison, but who would otherwise be homeless, and the Homeless Service Center partner agencies have all helped people with criminal histories obtain permanent housing.



**Figure 8** Institutions from which re-entering respondents were discharged. **NOTE:** Some respondents had been released recently from multiple types of institutions, so simply adding up the number of releases for any given year will not accurately count the number of persons represented. For example, in 2010, 125 persons had a total of 141 releases (81+26+24+10 = 141)

### Chronic homelessness

Based on HUD's definition, **85 persons, or 9%** of all 905 homeless households are chronically homeless (Table 3). This is certainly an undercount since many survey respondents did not supply enough information to determine whether or not they met all of the HUD chronic homelessness characteristics listed as items 1-4 in Table 3. Nevertheless, it is a significant decrease from 2008 when 158 chronically homeless persons were counted.<sup>4</sup> And it continues a trend that we began to observe in 2009 when 115 chronically homeless persons were counted.

To be considered chronically homeless based on HUD's definition, a person must be an unaccompanied individual who has been homeless for 12 months or more OR has had more than three episodes of homelessness in the last three years, AND has been sleeping in a place not meant for human habitation or in emergency shelter, AND has one of the following disabling conditions (mental disorder, substance abuse disorder, permanent physical or developmental disability).

Compared to recent national statistics, our current proportion of people who are chronically homeless is significantly lower than the United States, generally, where 18% of the homeless population is chronically homeless. Here, the 85 chronically homeless persons we counted is only 6% of the overall population of 1,334.

As shown in Table 3, long duration homelessness (32%), disabling conditions (37%), and being unsheltered or in emergency shelter (29%) are much more prevalent than would be assumed if one only looked at the number of HUD-defined chronically homeless.

**Table 3 Chronic homelessness by HUD criteria**

Chronic homelessness criteria	Number	Percent of all homeless households (N=905)
1. Homeless 12 months or more, <b>OR</b>	291	32%
2. Had 4 or more episodes of homelessness in last 3 years	147	16%
3. Has a disabling condition*	334	37%
4. Been sleeping in a place not meant for human habitation (unsheltered) or in emergency shelter	261	29%
<b>Chronically homeless (a homeless individual who meets criteria 1 OR 2, AND 3 AND 4)</b>	<b>85</b>	<b>9%</b>

\* Mental disorder, substance abuse disorder, permanent physical or developmental disability

<sup>4</sup> Due to a counting error in 2008, the published report that year reported that only 113 persons were considered to be chronically homeless by HUD's definition; however, only unsheltered persons were included in that calculation. Instead, we should have also included persons in emergency shelter who also meet the other criteria. The correct number of chronically homeless persons in 2008 is actually 158.

## Characteristics of homeless subpopulations

The homeless subpopulations described below include households that may have special housing and supportive services needs. As our community looks forward to improving services to end homelessness, it becomes increasingly important to understand the situations and experiences of households within these groups.

Much of the data in the sections below are derived from data in Table 4 through Table 15, which can be found on pages 21-26.

### Homeless families with children

About half (52%) of the 266 homeless families counted that include adults and children were doubled-up with another household at the time of the survey. An additional 27% were living in transitional housing. The housing situation of 11% of these families is unknown because we did not obtain housing situation data for them.<sup>5</sup> They are highly likely to report domestic violence (38%), inability to pay rent or mortgage (34%), and family breakup (25%) as reasons for their homelessness. Very few adults in this subgroup have recently re-entered the community from a residential institution such as jail or treatment facility (5%). Homeless families are also highly likely to be earning income from either a full-time (7%) or part-time job (10%), and they also commonly receive TANF (67%). It should be noted that the proportion of these families that had any employment decreased from 32% in 2009 to only 17% in 2010, and TANF households increased from 58% in 2009 to 67% in 2010.

### Domestic violence survivor households

There are 121 households that reported domestic violence as a reason for their homelessness.<sup>6</sup> Only 20% of this subgroup's adult respondents are male. Less than half of these households (42%) have children. Half of this group's households (50%) are sheltered in transitional housing programs, 26% are doubled-up with another household and 13% are in emergency shelter. Their top reasons for becoming homeless are domestic violence (100%), inability pay for housing (38%), family break-up (34%), substance abuse (26%), mental illness (25%), and job loss (23%). The most common income sources for domestic violence survivor households are TANF (36%), General Assistance – GAU or GAX – (16%), Social Security (15%), and SSI (13%). More than half (56%) are challenged by a disabling condition, and one in three (33%) of these household have been homeless for 12 months or more.

### Unaccompanied youth

*Please note: In past years, we have used several age groups and described them all as "youth". This has caused some confusion among this report's readers. Beginning this year, we will refer to youth as people who are minors (under 18 years of age), and young adults as those who are 18-25 years old. Another change from previous years relates to information we receive from the school districts about youth*

<sup>5</sup> Most of the missing data on housing situation is attributable to school district data, much of which is limited to very basic demographic data on families and does not include housing situation or other characteristics of homelessness.

<sup>6</sup> Please note that a survey respondent was considered to be a domestic violence survivor if she/he listed domestic violence as a reason for his/her homelessness. There may have been more survivors in the sample.

*homelessness. In years past, we reported statistics that included all homeless youth that schools had identified cumulatively from the beginning of the school year through date of the Point-in-Time Count survey. Beginning with this year's Count, we are only reporting those youth who are believed to be homeless at the time of the Count.*

We counted 55 unaccompanied homeless youth in this year's count. They ranged in age from 12 to 17 years old. Compared to all homeless persons, unaccompanied youth are more likely to seek shelter with another household (64%) and less likely to be found in emergency shelters (0%), transitional housing (0%) and unsheltered (4%). Because many of the unaccompanied youth counted in the survey were reported by the school districts, we have limited data on their homeless situation due to the way some schools report information for this survey.

We are particularly interested in following the trends in youth homelessness because our community has experienced a decrease in the amount of resources available to address youth homelessness. In fact, in 2009, due to severe budget cuts, Whatcom County's only emergency youth shelter was forced to close.

### **Chronically homeless persons**

Compared to the overall homeless population, the chronically homeless (according to HUD's definition) are older and more likely to be male. Among the 85 individuals who meet HUD's definition of chronically homeless, 84% are males, and their median age is 47 years old. This subgroup exhibits a high prevalence of mental illness (61%) and substance abuse disorders (42%). Compared to the overall homeless population, the chronically homeless are much more likely to have a permanent physical disability (49%) and dental problems (41%).

Chronically homeless individuals comprise the subgroup most likely to report mental illness (40%) and substance abuse disorders (47%) as reasons for their homelessness. SSI (22%) and GAU/GAX (33%) are the most common income sources within this homeless subgroup; however, nearly one in three (31%) report no income at all.

Nearly three-quarters (71%) of people who are chronically homeless are unsheltered. That proportion is the same as it was in 2009. Of the 25 people who are chronically homeless and living in shelters, 22 were at the Lighthouse Mission, two were at the YWCA and one was in a Northwest Youth Services shelter program.

### **Veterans**

This year's point-in-time count located 89 households that include a homeless veteran. The vast majority are unaccompanied individuals (87%) and male (88%). Their median age is 48 years old. Mental illness (36%) is common in this homeless subgroup. Homeless veteran households are twice as likely as the overall homeless population to have a permanent physical disability (35%) and they are much more likely to report having dental problems (27%).

Veteran households are highly likely to report being unsheltered (39%). They comprise the subgroup most likely to report that they are homeless due to losing a job (48%). They are also the most likely group to have any disabling condition (66%).<sup>7</sup> Homeless veterans commonly reported having SS/SSD (19%), SSI (10%),

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<sup>7</sup> For the purpose of this report, we use HUD's definition of "disabling condition" to include mental illness, substance abuse disorder, or permanent physical or developmental disability.

GAU/GAX (20%), or no source of income (29%). Only 20% of households with a homeless veteran reported receiving veterans benefits.

## Seniors

One of the changing demographic characteristics of the United States is the rising proportion of our citizens who are elderly. Much of this increase is due to the aging of the baby boomer population. Nationally, the percent of the population 65 and older has increased from 4.1 percent in 1900 to 12.6 percent today. The U.S. Department of Housing And urban Development (HUD) is forecasting an accompanying rise in the proportion of people who are elderly and homeless. HUD project that the elderly homeless population will increase by 33% over the next 10 years (through 2020) and more than double between now and 2050.

In Whatcom County, since 2007, the proportion of the senior homeless population counted during the Point-in-Time Count has remained stable at 6% (age 55 and older). However, there is no reason to believe that our communities will be less affected by the trends that HUD predicts will result in a rise in homelessness among seniors. Therefore, beginning with this year's report, we will begin analyzing seniors as a discrete homeless subpopulation. For these purposes, we choose to report seniors as people who, at the time of the Count, are 60 years old and older (various reports analyze seniors as being 55, 60, 62, or 65 years old).

During this year's Count, we found 30 persons who are homeless and who were at least 60 years old. They ranged in age from 60 to 83 years, with a median age of 63 years old. More than half (57%) are male, and homeless seniors are overwhelmingly single individuals (83%).

Nearly half of homeless seniors are unsheltered (47%), the rest are staying in transitional housing (17%), emergency shelter (13%), or doubled-up with another household (10%). This year we counted only one homeless senior who had recently re-entered the community from any residential institution (inpatient substance abuse treatment). They are the most likely subpopulation to say that their homelessness is due to a medical problem (55%), and they are unable to pay for housing (45%). Half of homeless seniors have been homeless for 12 months or more and more than half (57%) have a disabling condition. Their income sources tend to be Social Security (63%) or SSI (33%).

Homeless seniors are likely to be veterans (42%), but not very likely to be chronically homeless (13%). The disabling conditions they report include permanent physical disability (43%), mental illness (23%), substance abuse disorder (13%), and dental problems (16%).

## Young adults

Of the 251 young, homeless adults (ages 18-25) counted in this year's survey, most tend to be doubled-up with another household (57%). Other housing situations include transitional (18%), emergency shelter (7%), or unsheltered (10%).

Among the most frequently cited reasons for their homelessness are family breakup (33%), inability to pay for housing (28%), and substance abuse (24%). Relatively few young adults are chronically homeless (4%); however, 27% have been homeless for 12 months or longer, and 32% report a disabling condition. Only 8% said that they had recently re-entered the community from jail or prison.

Young adults are highly likely to report having no income at all (31%). The most frequently reported sources of income include TANF (29%), part-time job (13%), and full-time job (8%).

### **Persons re-entering the community from a residential institution**

This year, there were 158 persons in households which included at least one person who had recently been released from one or more of four categories of residential institution: jail or prison (65%), psychiatric hospital (16%), inpatient substance abuse treatment (22%), or juvenile detention (7%).

The housing situation of persons in these households were as follows: unsheltered (25%), doubled-up with another household (24%), transitional housing (23%), and emergency shelter (10%).

Half of the persons in this subgroup attribute their homelessness to substance abuse and 39% say that mental illness is a factor. Other common homelessness factors include felony conviction (32%), inability to pay for housing (33%), and lost job (31%).

Nearly two in three of this subgroup has a disabling condition (63%), and almost half (47%) have been homeless for 12 months or more (though only 16% are considered to be chronically homeless).

People in households in this subgroup are equally likely to have no income (27%) as they are to have GAU/GAX as an income source (27%). TANF is a source of income for 18% in this group.

*NOTE: much of the data referenced in the section above that describes homeless subpopulations can be found in the following series of tables. Also note that the size of a particular subgroup (indicated by "N=X") changes for different tables because for some survey questions, fewer people within that group provided answers.*

**Table 4 Source of shelter used by homeless households in selected subgroups**

Shelter	Families with children (N=266)		Survivors of domestic violence (N=121)		Unaccompanied youth (N=55)		All homeless households (N=905)	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Emergency	16	6	16	13	0	0	108	12
Transitional	73	27	60	50	0	0	190	21
With other household	137	52	31	26	35	64	346	38
Motel	5	2	2	2	0	0	12	1
Unsheltered	6	2	10	8	2	4	153	17
Total known	237	89	119	98	37	67	809	89
Unknown	29	11	2	2	18	33	96	11

**Table 5 Reasons for homelessness reported by homeless households in selected subgroups**

Reasons for homelessness	Families with children (N=135)		Survivors of domestic violence (N=121)		Unaccompanied youth (N=13)		All homeless households (N=612)	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Mental illness	14	10	30	25	4	31	132	22
Alcohol or drug use	19	14	32	26	10	77	206	34
Unable to pay rent/mrtge	46	34	46	38	2	15	184	30
Family break-up	34	25	41	34	6	46	159	26
Domestic violence	51	38	121	100	0	0	121	20
Lost job	30	22	28	23	0	0	194	32
Temp. living sit. ended	11	8	21	17	0	0	92	15
Felony conviction	12	9	17	14	2	15	90	15
Medical problems	10	7	23	19	0	0	111	18
Poor credit	20	15	19	16	0	0	82	13
Lack of job skills	8	6	17	14	1	8	61	10
Discharged from inst.	1	1	8	7	0	0	45	7
Eviction (nonpayment)	23	17	15	12	0	0	61	10

**Table 6 Chronic homelessness and re-entry characteristics of households in selected subgroups**

Characteristics of homelessness	Families with children (N=266)		Survivors of domestic violence (N=121)		Unaccompanied youth (N=55)		All homeless households (N=905)	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
>12 mos. Homeless	46	17	40	33	8	15	291	32
>3 times homeless	16	6	31	26	7	13	147	16
Disabling condition*	19	7	68	56	8	15	334	37
Chronic (HUD)	0	0	8	7	0	0	85	9
<b>Re-entering community</b>								
Any residential facility	13	5	12	10	9	16	125	14
Jail	8	3	7	6	0	0	81	9
Psychiatric hosp.	1	0	4	3	0	0	24	3
Inpatient treatment	4	2	5	4	0	0	26	3
Juvenile detention	0	0	0	0	9	16	10	1

\* Someone in household has a mental health disorder, substance abuse disorder, permanent physical or developmental disability

**Table 7 Income sources reported by households in selected subgroups**

Income sources	Families with children (N=135)		Survivors of domestic violence (N=108)		Unaccompanied youth (N=10)		All homeless households (N=617)	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Full-time job	10	7	9	8	0	0	39	6
No income	13	10	15	14	10	100	163	26
Unemployment	4	3	4	4	0	0	29	5
TANF	91	67	39	36	0	0	120	19
Relatives or friends	8	6	2	2	0	0	31	5
L&I	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0
Social Security	5	4	16	15	0	0	67	11
SSI	8	6	14	13	0	0	77	12
GAU/GAX	7	5	17	16	0	0	108	18
Part-time job	14	10	6	6	0	0	51	8
Day labor	0	0	2	2	0	0	22	4
Agricultural work	2	1	3	3	0	0	7	1

**Table 8 Source of shelter used by homeless households in selected subgroups**

Shelter	Chronically homeless (HUD) (N=85)		Unsheltered (N=153)		Veterans (N=89)		All homeless households (N=809)	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Emergency	25	29	0	0	22	25	108	12
Transitional	0	0	0	0	15	17	190	21
With other household	0	0	0	0	12	13	346	38
Motel	0	0	0	0	1	1	12	1
Unsheltered	60	71	153	100	35	39	153	17
Total known	85	100	153	100	85	96	809	89
Unknown	0	0	0	0	4	4	96	11

**Table 9 Reasons for homelessness reported by homeless households in selected subgroups**

Reasons for homelessness	Chronically homeless (HUD) (N=78)		Unsheltered (N=120)		Veterans (N=83)		All homeless households (N=612)	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Mental illness	31	40	40	33	18	22	132	22
Alcohol or drug use	37	47	43	36	32	39	206	34
Unable to pay rent/mrtge	24	31	44	37	26	31	184	30
Family break-up	20	26	29	24	17	20	159	26
Domestic violence	8	10	10	8	4	5	121	20
Lost job	34	44	49	41	40	48	194	32
Temp. living sit. ended	17	22	19	16	10	12	92	15
Felony conviction	13	17	20	17	8	10	90	15
Medical problems	31	40	38	32	23	28	111	18
Poor credit	16	21	21	18	14	17	82	13
Lack of job skills	12	15	13	11	10	12	61	10
Discharged from inst.	13	17	11	9	8	10	45	7
Eviction	10	13	14	12	8	10	61	10

**Table 10 Chronic homelessness and re-entry characteristics of households in selected subgroups**

Characteristics of homelessness	Chronically homeless (HUD) (N=85)		Unsheltered (N=153)		Veterans (N=89)		All homeless households (N=905)	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
>12 mos. Homeless	74	87	93	61	52	58	291	32
>3 times homeless	47	55	57	37	25	28	147	16
Disabling condition*	85	100	85	56	59	66	334	37
Chronic (HUD)	85	100	60	39	26	29	85	9
<b>Re-entering community</b>								
Any residential facility	25	29	33	22	16	18	125	14
Jail	19	22	26	17	12	13	81	9
Psychiatric hosp.	5	6	5	3	3	3	24	3
Inpatient treatment	5	6	5	3	4	4	26	3
Juvenile detention	0	0	1	1	0	0	10	1

\* Someone in household has a mental health disorder, substance abuse disorder, permanent physical or developmental disability

**Table 11 Income sources reported by households in selected subgroups**

Income sources	Chronically homeless (HUD) (N=78)		Unsheltered (N=130)		Veterans (N=79)		All homeless households (N=617)	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Full-time job	0	0	4	3	10	13	39	6
No income	24	31	48	37	23	29	163	26
Unemployment	0	0	5	4	5	6	29	5
TANF	1	1	5	4	3	4	120	19
Relatives or friends	2	3	5	4	7	9	31	5
L&I	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0
Social Security	10	13	17	13	15	19	67	11
SSI	17	22	24	18	8	10	77	12
GAU/GAX	26	33	28	22	16	20	108	18
Part-time job	2	3	6	5	6	8	51	8
Day labor	4	5	8	6	5	6	22	4
Agricultural work	0	0	0	0	0	0	7	1

**Table 12 Source of shelter used by persons in selected subgroups**

Shelter	Seniors – 60+ years (N=30)		Young adults – 18- 25 years (N=251)		Persons in households re- entering from any facility (N=158)		All homeless persons (N=1,334)	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Emergency	4	13	17	7	16	10	135	10
Transitional	5	17	46	18	36	23	291	22
With other household	3	10	142	57	38	24	557	42
Motel	0	0	2	1	7	4	28	2
Unsheltered	14	47	26	10	39	25	189	14
Total known	26	87	233	93	136	86	1200	90
Unknown	4	13	18	7	22	14	134	10

**Table 13 Reasons for homelessness reported for persons in selected subgroups**

Reasons for homelessness	Seniors – 60+ years (N=20)		Young adults – 18- 25 years (N=170)		Persons in households re- entering from any facility (N=146)		All homeless persons (N=913)	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Mental illness	4	20	21	12	57	39	168	18
Alcohol or drug use	5	25	41	24	73	50	260	28
Unable to pay rent/mrtge	9	45	47	28	48	33	311	34
Family break-up	5	25	56	33	38	26	225	25
Domestic violence	3	15	31	18	15	10	213	23
Lost job	8	40	33	19	45	31	289	32
Temp. living sit. ended	0	0	31	18	28	19	123	13
Felony conviction	1	5	18	11	47	32	123	13
Medical problems	11	55	8	5	34	23	144	16
Poor credit	2	10	19	11	30	21	128	14
Lack of job skills	1	5	15	9	14	10	79	9
Discharged from inst.	0	0	9	5	34	23	50	5
Eviction	3	15	10	6	17	12	116	13

**Table 14 Chronic homelessness and re-entry characteristics of persons in selected subgroups**

Characteristics of homelessness	Seniors – 60+ years (N=30)		Young adults – 18-25 years (N=251)		Persons in households re-entering from any facility (N=158)		All homeless persons (N=1,334)	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
>12 mos. Homeless	15	50	67	27	75	47	396	30
>3 times homeless	7	23	37	15	50	32	177	13
Disabling condition*	17	57	80	32	99	63	420	31
Chronic (HUD)	4	13	9	4	25	16	85	6
<b>Re-entering community</b>								
Any residential facility	1	3	32	13	158	100	158	12
Jail	0	0	19	8	102	65	102	8
Psychiatric hosp.	0	0	8	3	26	16	26	2
Inpatient treatment	1	3	6	2	35	22	35	3
Juvenile detention	0	0	0	0	11	7	11	1

\* Someone in household has a mental health disorder, substance abuse disorder, permanent physical or developmental disability

**Table 15 Income sources reported for persons in selected subgroups**

Income sources	Seniors – 60+ years (N=24)		Young adults – 18-25 years (N=189)		Persons in households re-entering from any facility (N=142)		All homeless persons (N=942)	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Full-time job	0	0	15	8	9	6	68	7
No income	1	4	58	31	38	27	194	21
Unemployment	0	0	8	4	7	5	47	5
TANF	0	0	55	29	25	18	307	33
Relatives or friends	3	13	10	5	4	3	65	7
L&I	0	0	0	0	1	1	2	0
Social Security	15	63	12	6	12	8	100	11
SSI	8	33	13	7	13	9	102	11
GAU/GAX	1	4	14	7	39	27	131	14
Part-time job	2	8	25	13	6	4	100	11
Day labor	1	4	5	3	7	5	27	3
Agricultural work	0	0	2	1	0	0	23	2

## Homeless count methodology

### Overview

The Point-in-Time count relies on numerous volunteers and voluntary participation by many agencies countywide. Essentially, the methodology of the count includes three components: (1) coordination and training, (2) data collection, and (3) data processing.

*Coordination and training* require that all agencies identified as having a role in the County's continuum of care be contacted and recruited to participate in the count. Then participating agencies receive instructions for that year's count and are given data collection tools most appropriate for their situation (e.g. paper survey forms or online database access for direct data entry).

*Data collection* activities include (1) having clients fill out the survey questionnaires, (2) having volunteer interviewers assist clients complete the survey questionnaires, or (3) having agency staff enter client information directly into the online Point-in-Time Count database. In some cases, agency staff complete paper questionnaires for their clients.

*Data processing* begins when the paper survey questionnaires are delivered to the County's contracted data analyst or when the data is entered by participating agency staff into the online database. Data from paper forms is added to the online database and then the data is "cleaned." Cleaning includes several processes designed to detect data entry errors and identify and remove duplicated survey respondents<sup>8</sup>. The cleaned data is then imported into special software to facilitate statistical analysis.

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<sup>8</sup> Duplicated survey respondents are identified using automated and non-automated processes that rely on unique identifying data derived by combining fields of data such as sex, date of birth and initials.

### **Data assumptions and limitations**

National research indicates that point-in-time counts generally underestimate the number of those who are homeless because:

- A point-in-time is just a “snapshot” and may not capture all those who are cycling in and out of homelessness over the course of a specific period of time (e.g. annually). Furthermore, an annual “snapshot” may miss any seasonal fluctuations that may occur in our communities.
- It is difficult to find where all the unsheltered people reside. It is impossible to know all the places that might provide unconventional shelter (i.e. tents, abandoned cars) for one night.

Furthermore, due to survey item nonresponse (when a respondent skips one or more of the Point-in-Time Count survey questions), some of the analyses are based on only a subset of all homeless households counted. For example, only 617 of all 905 households responded to the income source question. This large subset may not accurately represent the larger population of homeless households.

**Appendix A: Whatcom County Homeless Count Report to  
Washington State Department of Commerce**

**April 30, 2010**

**Whatcom County 2009 Point-in-Time Homeless Count Report to  
Washington State Department of Community, Trade and  
Economic Development**

**1. Briefly describe your efforts to count unsheltered persons.**

A team of Coalition for the Homeless members took lead roles and used affirmative outreach activities to locate and count targeted population. The unsheltered populations that were targeted were those that participate in community meal programs; street youth; DOC homeless offenders re-entering the community; tribal members who are homeless; families of homeless students in schools; people in encampments; people at the Mission run drop in center, visitors of the mental health day center; people who accessed the Community Resource Center; food bank visitors. The lead team members helped to organize volunteers to conduct the count on January 28 (or the week of). The entire Coalition received training in how to conduct the count.

**2. Briefly describe how you minimized the duplication of those that were counted.**

Generally, we limited the time period when the count was conducted and we used data processing methods to identify households and persons that were counted more than once. Specifically, during data processing, we used Excel and SPSS software to identify potential duplicate cases by comparing birth dates, sex, and initials. Survey forms for these identified cases were inspected and those determined to be duplicated cases were deleted from the data, retaining the data from the survey form with the most complete data.

**3. What quantitative data or qualitative impressions do you have on how complete the count was in your county?**

This year's count was conducted where more volunteer and service providers participated than in past years and a number of sites were added to the year's count. The perception by many of the team leads as well as other coalition members is that we did a fairly thorough job of coverage. While there are certainly persons we did not count, it is not possible to estimate, quantitatively the extent of any under count. Specific undercounted subpopulations include the following : unsheltered persons - though we strive to know where people are camped and parked throughout the year, we undoubtedly miss some people, particularly those who do not want to be found; persons and families who are doubled-up with other families to prevent from being unsheltered - we do count these people as homeless in our community; however, we certainly do not count everyone in that situation because we do not have specific programs or outreach that targets people in this situation.

<b>Part 1: Homeless Population</b>	<b>Sheltered</b>		<b>Unsheltered</b>	<b>Temporarily Living with Family or Friends</b>
	<b>Emergency</b>	<b>Transitional</b>		
Number of Families with Children (Family Households):	21	73	6	137
Number of Households <u>without</u> Children:	99	119	145	178
Number of Households <u>without</u> Adults (nobody over 17 years old):	0	0	2	53
1. Number of Persons in Families with Children:	57	166	15	291
2. Number of Single Individuals and Persons in Households <u>without</u> Children:	107	127	175	222
3. Number of Persons in Households <u>without</u> Adults (nobody over 17 years old):	0	0	2	54
<b>Total Persons:</b> (Add Lines Numbered 1, 2 & 3)	164	293	192	567
<b>Part 2: Homeless Subpopulations</b>	<b>Sheltered</b>		<b>Unsheltered</b>	<b>Temporarily Living with Family or Friends</b>
	<b>Emergency</b>	<b>Transitional</b>		
a. Chronically Homeless	25	0	60	0
b. Mentally Disabled	43	74	66	45
c. Persons with alcohol and/or other drug problems	16	63	41	28
d. Veterans	23	15	35	12
e. Persons with HIV/AIDS	1	1	7	1
f. Victims of Domestic Violence	38	112	11	54
g. Unaccompanied Youth (Under 18)	0	0	2	54
h. Children (Under 18) in Families	45	112	12	236
i. Physically Disabled	27	37	53	25
j. Seasonal Agricultural Workers	0	0	0	6
k. Persons with both substance use and mental health problems	8	26	25	6
l. Senior citizens (aged 65 or older)	2	2	5	2

NOTE: Due to missing data about shelter from some homeless count survey forms, these numbers may not exactly match those reported elsewhere in Whatcom County's 2010 Point-in-Time Count report. For example, we counted 1,334 homeless persons, but the total persons in Part 1 above equals only 1,216 because some survey forms lacked data on where that household was sheltered the night before the count.