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Homelessness rate up in county

By [Julie N. Chang](#) | The News Herald

The number of homeless people in Burke County increased 18 percent since 2008, according to Burke Continuum of Care's 2009 point-in-time count of homeless individuals and families.

"We should be cautious about concluding anything from this data, but the findings do indicate that more families are facing the horror of homelessness," said David Collins, coordinator of the count and executive director of the House of Refuge.

The annual count occurs in a 24-hour period when volunteers canvass the county.

Burke Continuum of Care also set up official counting stations at Burke United Christian Ministries, the Outreach Center and Catawba Valley Behavioral Health.

The count started on the evening of Jan. 28, and continued into Thursday. The count provides statistics needed to obtain state and federal support. It is conducted in accordance with guidelines set by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.

Collins said 180 homeless individuals and families were tallied this year. That's up from the 148 in 2008.

"The good news, though, is that we've seen a drop among the population that is chronically homeless," Collins said.

"That may just mean we're counting differently, and it may also mean the strategies employed by the Burke Continuum of Care for the Homeless to end chronic homelessness are bringing that number down."

Surveys and interviews were conducted during the count. They indicate that unemployment, issues with rent and foreclosure are the leading causes of homelessness in the county.

Based on its findings, Burke Continuum of Care believes a combination of permanent supportive housing, appropriate use of relocation grants, rental assistance and long-term subsidies could reduce homelessness.

Burke Continuum of Care is a group of county residents, non-profits and government agencies working to find help for the homeless in the community.

Each homeless person who participated in the count received a backpack of personal-care items and clothing.

Collins said detailed statistics from the surveys will be available in a few weeks.