

Burke County, North Carolina

Point-In-Time Count of Homeless People

January 29, 2008



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To the Burke County Continuum of Care for the Homeless Committee
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Introduction

Since 2003, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) required applicants for federal homeless assistance grants to report the number of people who are homeless in their communities at a particular time. HUD currently requires that communities conduct a point-in-time count during the last week of January. Collecting reliable baseline data is essential to understanding the causes of homelessness and designing effective interventions to help homeless people rebuild their lives.



“To be homeless literally means that you have no home to live in, that you are deprived of your sense of place and privacy, your sense of belonging – all essential elements of identity, of self-worth.”

New England Journal of Public Policy

On January 30, 2007 Burke County counted homeless individuals and families living in emergency shelters, in transitional housing programs, in the woods, on the streets, and in cars or other unsheltered locations. This count was the first coordinated enumeration of homeless people in Burke County using consistent data collection methods. This historic effort brought together non-profits, city and county agencies, and concerned citizens to gather critical data that will be used to inform efforts to end homelessness in Burke County and by communities across the state in their applications for federal homeless assistance funding.

The data collected is designed to help service providers and policy makers to better understand the dimensions of homelessness and help to establish, over time, a means to measure the effectiveness of initiatives to end homelessness.

The organizers of Burke County Point-In-Time count recognize that continued data collection at regular intervals will be necessary to understand the dynamic causes of homelessness, to evaluate the effectiveness of programs serving homeless people and, ultimately, to track progress towards ending homelessness in Burke County.

Public perceptions of the homeless are often based on the most visible individuals of the homeless population. It's likely the image of sidewalk panhandlers, indigents sleeping in a park, or sign-holders at freeway ramps shape the public's overall perception of the homeless. The Point-In-Time Homeless Count method gathers data that provides a more complete picture. This information in turn can be used to help change public perceptions and to inform policy makers of the deeper issues contributing to the homelessness problem.

In fact, of the 148 individuals counted in Burke County's 2008



"In the Western world, it is clear that a lack of affordable housing is one of the leading contributing causes of homelessness today."

David Levinson,
Encyclopedia of Homelessness

Point-in-Time Count, 23% were under the age 18. Often, a homeless child lives with one parent, a relative or a friend. They may be sleeping in a car, staying in a camper at a state park, or temporarily living in someone else's house. They may catch a school bus from a motel where they are temporarily living. After their family flees domestic violence, they may be sheltered in transitional housing or living in an emergency shelter. In truth, a youth on the street may live there rather than in an unstable or violent family home. In Burke County and across the nation, an increasing number of families are living on the margin. Many, and not just those at the lowest economic strata, could be at risk. The deindustrialization of the county, the bursting of the housing bubble and the high rate of defaults in the subprime financial crisis has left many with fewer affordable housing options. Low-paying service jobs that don't cover the basic living expenses, an uncertain job market, rising energy costs nibbling away at family budgets, or an illness uncovered by insurance or a lack of health insurance altogether have squeezed people's capacity to make it through a financial emergency. Couple this current reality with a lack of savings for an emergency, and even economically stable families or individuals can be at significant financial risk.

The impact of alcohol and drug abuse as a significant contributor to homelessness is well-documented. The addiction affects the entire household. This societal problem has a lasting impact on a significant number of our next generation and our children's children. While the Detox Center has closed, there are successful clean and sober houses, recovery programs, and other facilities that provide a safe haven while people tackle their dependency on drugs or alcohol and receive the support they need to stay clean.

Any one thing can lead to homelessness, but there is usually more than one reason people become homeless. The most common contributors are mental illness, alcohol or drug use, inability to pay rent/mortgage, job loss, domestic violence and family break-up.

At times, some of the individuals in jail or under the jurisdiction of the Department of Corrections were homeless when they went in or they will be homeless when they get out. However, both the Burke Catawba Detention Center and the city jail reported that they held no homeless persons under their purview on the night of the Point-In-Time count.

"One factor contributing to the invisibility of the working poor in this region is that the 'relative 'haves' don't tend to interact with the relative 'have not's,'"

Dr. Jasper Hemphill,
Olive Hill Community
Economic Development
Corporation

On the other hand, there were homeless that reported being recently released from custody on the night of the count. The Urban Institute warns that some 650,000 prisoners will be released each year over the next ten years. Burke county will likely feel the impact of such a flood. Many former prisoners are able to live, at least temporarily, with family members. But those who cannot report limited housing options and little help in finding a place to stay. Policy planning for homeless offenders and the difficulties of housing them is a pressing community issue.

Point-in-Time Count of Homeless Persons 2008

why do a Point-in-Time Count?

The Burke County Continuum of Care system must complete a Point-in-Time count of homeless persons on a biennial basis to be eligible for federal grants that brings funding into the county. One of the benefits to the community, in addition to helping City and County leaders see a clearer profile of our homeless population, is that it increases public awareness and serves as a catalyst for problem solving. Perhaps more importantly, the Point-In-Time count consolidates planning and cooperation among our programs and agencies who are striving to end homelessness in Burke County.

what does it mean to be "homeless"?

As defined by the federal Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), to be **homeless** is to lack a fixed, regular, nighttime residence. Furthermore, a person is considered homeless if they:

- don't have a decent and safe shelter or funds to purchase a place to stay;
- are camping in a tent on their own property; or
- are receiving monetary help to stay in housing and would otherwise be homeless.
- are in jail and didn't have a permanent address upon incarceration.

This year's count of 148 individuals does NOT include the 'couch surfing' or 'doubled-up' populations. However, that does not diminish the fact that those who are living temporarily with others are a primary at-risk population.

People are considered **chronically homeless** if they have been living on the streets, or have been in and out of shelters for more than one year. "On the streets" means living in cars, tents, in abandoned buildings and other places not meant for human habitation. The chronically homeless can be difficult to serve and to count, and may have difficulty accessing or remaining in assistance programs.

"We can no longer fool ourselves that we are being frugal and prudent with our tax dollars by only giving minimal attention to the chronically homeless population."

Terry Allebaugh (Executive Director Housing for New Hope in Durham, North Carolina) in his testimony before the United States Senate.

They are more likely to avoid assistance or contact with mainstream society altogether. In addition to traditional fixed assistance programs, street outreach volunteers and workers meet the homeless near their camps, bring them sack lunches, council them or just listen. They work to provide meaningful contact with society and hope to help them get to a more stable place in life.

Participating Organizations

Some 40 volunteers from 25 Burke County organizations and agencies participated in the count. The agencies and organizations are listed below.

Children's Services

Burke County School System
Department of Social Services

Food Banks/Meals Programs

Burke United Christian Ministries
East Burke Christian Ministries
The Christian Outreach Center

Emergency Shelter/Street Outreach

House of Refuge Ministries
Options of Burke County

Health/Mental Health Providers

Broughton Hospital
Catawba County Mental Health
Good Samaritan Clinic
Foothills Area Program
Blue Ridge Health Care

Transitional Housing and Service Providers

UPLift Family Housing (BUCM)
Flynn Christian Home
Meeting Place Mission
Morganton Housing Authority
New Beginnings
Olive Hill Economic Development Corporation
Oxford House
Red Cross

Law Enforcement

Burke County Sheriff's Department
Morganton Department of Public Safety

The 2008 Homeless Count cast a wider net and reached deeper into the community. The result was we counted more homeless people.

Does this mean we have more homeless?

Not entirely.

Reentry Programs

EGAP Ministries

Repay, Inc.

Veterans Services

Burke Veterans Outreach Ministries

why use the point-in-time count method?

With any method, it is difficult to count the homeless – especially the transient population or those living in camps or on the streets. We use a point-in-time count method because it is relatively easy to administer and the results provide snapshot-in-time data which can be used in planning purposes. Burke County’s point-in-time count is conducted each year in late January as a member of the Balance of States Continuum of Care and provides data and a picture of homelessness to federal, state and local agencies that can be used over time to identify potential trends and target coordinated planning efforts to reduce homelessness.

it’s the best tool we’ve got, but...

Not every homeless person gets counted using the point-in-time method or any method. Why?

- A thorough count relies solely on local organizations and agencies counting the individuals they serve. In addition, some agencies may not participate each year or they may participate, but not count anyone.
- The unsheltered or intermittently homeless may not get counted; they are more difficult to find or identify and may not have been accessing services on the day of the count.

Not all of the information gathered can ever be complete.

- The only **required** information on the statewide standardized form is the individual's first and last initials, age and gender -- an individual cannot be counted unless birth year and gender is provided
- Count forms may not be completed fully, as individuals are not required to include information they don’t wish to reveal. While some information is better than no information, it is inherently incomplete. This incomplete picture is inherent to any count method.

Improvements are made to the count methodology each year.

- One of the 2008 goals was to cast a wider net throughout the county by counting more street homeless and increasing the number of countywide agencies partici-

The image shows a complex data entry form for a homeless count. It features a grid of fields for recording individual data, including sections for 'Personnel Information', 'Agency Information', and 'Individual Information'. The form includes various checkboxes and text boxes for recording specific details about the count and the individuals being counted.

Point in Time Homeless Count Form

Types of Homeless Housing

- **Emergency Shelter:** short-term (generally 1-90 day stays) beds which serve the needs of homeless persons. "Shelter" is generally defined as emergency housing with limited services to assist the homeless person to move to independence and affordable housing following their stay.
- **Shelter Plus Care** designed to provide housing and supportive services on a long-term basis for homeless and their families who are living in places not intended for human habitation. The program allows for a variety of housing choices, and a range of supportive services funded by other sources, in response to the needs of the hard-to-reach homeless population.
- **Transitional Housing:** (up to 24 months) beds are combined with critical supportive services, providing the time needed to help individuals transition to independent living in affordable housing.

pating. Fourteen additional agencies participated this year and seven teams of volunteers searched for street homeless.

interpreting the data

Every effort was made to eliminate duplication of individuals in count results. In addition to counting simultaneously in strategically diverse locations, each interviewee was asked if they had been previously interviewed or counted.

It's critical that the use of percentages in this report be understood.

Percentages have been included in order to provide additional context to the raw numbers, and they allow for somewhat accurate comparisons year to year and within categories of information.

- Percentages actually represent the **minimum** number of people or households experiencing that situation because not every question on the form is responded to 100% of the time. All other percentages are based on the actual number of responses recorded.
- Individual data is collected specific to each person on the upper portion of the form and includes individual family member age and gender plus their individual disabilities.
- A lone individual is a household and a group of related people listed on the same form are a household.

can previous homeless counts be compared?

Each year the count casts a wider net and reaches deeper into the community. The result was we counted more homeless people. Does this mean we have more homeless? Not entirely. Here's why. Burke County has just two consecutive years (2007 and 2008) in which the count has been done in largely the same way with the same form. However, the number of agencies and volunteers participating greatly increased in 2008. In order to establish reliable data and to determine potential trends, Point-in-Time counts need to be duplicated over several years using the same process and a consistent form year after year while including the same service providers over time. However, in an attempt to put the 2007 and the 2008 counts in perspective, percentage comparisons have been drawn to reveal variances between the two years. The percentage comparisons are one way to extract additional meaning from the raw number comparisons.

variance between the 2007 and the 2008 count

To put the 2008 homeless count total into context, one must account for the impact of the increase in agencies participating in the 2008 count. It is inaccurate to state that there is a nearly 50% increase in

homelessness in Burke County compared to last year. What's more likely is that we did a more thorough of the homeless we have in Burke County.

- The 2007 Count had 11 agencies/organizations participating and 96 counted.
- The 2008 Count had a 25 agencies/organizations participating and 148 counted.

Much of the difference between the numbers counted in 2007 vs. 2008 can be attributed to the more than doubling of participating agencies and the following factors.



"I work hard to find a place to lay my head and put food in my stomach."

- Ricky Cook, Burke County

street homeless

Counting street homeless and those in outlying camps is difficult especially with the rural and wooded pockets around our county. Significant progress was made in 2008 in counting this population in locations around the county – in camps, at soup kitchens and meal programs, and on the streets. Some outreach organizations are reluctant to participate in the count due to concerns of potentially jeopardizing the trust of street homeless by having them fill out a form. This year some individuals agreed to participate in the count as street outreach workers. This made a huge difference.

volunteers helped with the count

In addition to volunteers from area churches, students in the Western Piedmont Community College Human Services program greatly helped at facilities where surveyors were needed. Volunteers counted people at the Christian Outreach Center, Burke United Christian Ministries Soup Kitchen and as street outreach workers.

Survey Results

The January 2008 Point-in-Time Homeless Count results:

- 148 people were counted as homeless
- 110 households were counted (lone individuals are a household and each household of multiple people counts as one household)
- Of the homeless individuals, 68% male and 32% female
- 23% are children under 18 years old
- 13% were veterans
- 10% are seriously mentally ill
- 32% have diagnosable substance use disorders
- 10% are victims of domestic violence

- 2% were discharged during the previous 30 days from the criminal justice system
- 4% were discharged during the previous 30 days from the behavioral health system
- 1% were discharged during the previous 30 days from the health care system
- 3% were identified themselves as deaf (this figure was not part of the HUD survey but captured for local use)
- 10% were identified as Chronically Homeless



“The lack of affordable housing is considered the leading cause of homelessness by city officials.”

US Council of Mayors

Reasons for Homelessness

Homelessness is caused by many factors. Reasons for homelessness include mental illness, substance abuse, domestic abuse, and co-occurring disorders. Yet, “the lack of affordable housing is considered the leading cause of homelessness,” according to the U.S. Council of Mayors.

increase in people living in poverty

The median household income has *sharply declined* from the inflation-adjusted 2000 income levels in Burke County. The income level has *decreased* to \$32,963, representing a 20.9 percent *decline*. The poverty rate in Burke County, North Carolina has increased by 4.4 percent from the levels reported in the Decennial Census of 2000, moving from 10.7 percent to 15.1 percent.

increased housing costs

- \$10.62 Hourly wage needed to afford a two-bedroom rental unit at Fair Market Rent
- 38% Percent of renters than don't earn enough to afford a two-bedroom apartment at Fair Market Rent (3,394 renters in Burke County).
- 22.8% Percent of households with housing problems²
- 30.1% Percent of renter households with housing problems (2,687 households)
- 20.2%Percent of owner households with housing problems (5,177 households)
- 38.4%Percent of low-income households³ paying more than 30% of income for housing

Data Sources: HUD, Homelessness: Programs and the People They Serve; A Summary Report, 1999 2000 Census, National Low Income Housing Coalition's 2006 "Out of Reach" report, and the Bureau of Labor Statistics

U.S. Department of Labor. Bureau of Labor Statistics. Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages (QCEW). Private Sector Employment Only.

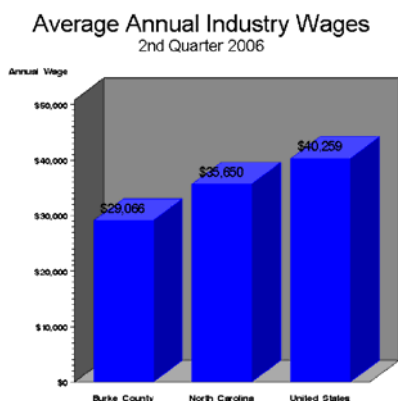
¹ “Fair Market Rent” is generally the 40% percentile rent for the area. For a detailed definition see www.huduser.org/datasets/fmr/fmrover.doc.

² “Housing Problems” are defined as having to pay more than 30% of income for housing, having inadequate kitchen or plumbing facilities, or having over-crowded housing (more than one person per room).

³ “Low-income” means earning less than 80% of the median family income for the area.

- 90.7% Percent, of low income households with housing problems, whose problem is cost
- 2,110 Low-income renters paying more than 30% of income for housing
- 3,405 Low-income owners paying more than 30% of income for housing

Of all renters and owners in Burke County, renters with incomes less than 30% of median family income are most likely to have a housing problem.



decline in employment

The increase in the levels of poverty can be correlated with the five year decline in employment. Of the area's industries, the *Apparel knitting mills* industry experienced most substantial job loss, losing 735 jobs in that time period. The declines in the *Apparel knitting mills* industry make up 25.6 percent of the total job loss in Burke County.

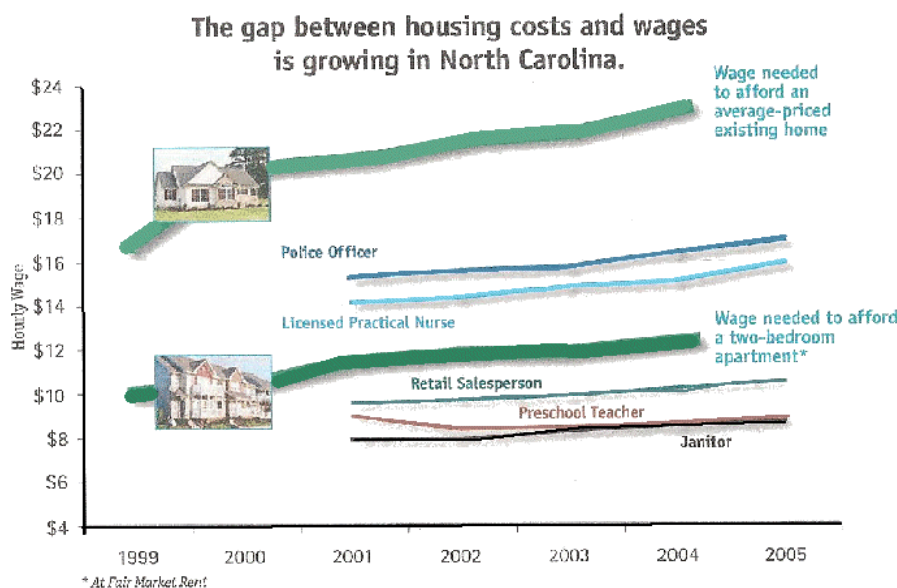
Top 5 Industries

1. Apparel knitting mills (735 jobs lost)
2. Other electrical equipment and component mfg. (374 jobs lost)
3. Grocery stores (231 jobs lost)
4. Other general merchandise stores (217 jobs lost)
5. Residential building construction (163 jobs lost)

U.S. Department of Labor. Bureau of Labor Statistics. Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages (QCEW). Private Sector Employment Only.

trends for low-income wage earners

- Home ownership is up, but so are foreclosures and bankruptcies.





1% (or 3.5 million people a year) of the U.S. population is likely to experience homelessness. (Urban Institute, 2000)

- Welfare rolls are down; the poverty rate is trending up.
- Unemployment is falling, but wages have consistently lagged inflation.

the bottom line

An increasing number of low-income families work and own assets like homes; but at the same time financial insecurity has increased. (The Brookings Institution Metropolitan Policy Program: Laboratories for Capitalism: How States Get the Market Right for Working Families)

high turnover in the homeless population

The high turnover in the homeless population documented by recent studies, suggests that many more people experience homelessness than previously thought; however, most of these people do not remain homeless (National Coalition for the Homeless).

lack of health care and lack of any health insurance

22% of the single adult homeless population in the U.S. suffers from some form of severe and persistent mental illness. (U.S. Conference of Mayors, 2001)

- In Burke County 37% of the homeless people surveyed during the 2008 Point-In-Time count were identified as being seriously mentally ill, having a diagnosed substance abuse or behavioral disorder.
- The number of uninsured Americans rose for the sixth consecutive year in 2006, to 47.0 million, and the number of uninsured children rose for the second straight year, to 8.7 million, according to Census data released on August 28, 2007. Even more striking is the report that one out of three people living at or below the poverty level have no health insurance and report unmet physical, mental and dental needs.



The VA estimates that nearly 200,000 veterans are homeless on any given night. And more than **half a million** experience homelessness over the course of a year.

NCVH website

drug and alcohol abuse

34% of homeless adults experience an addiction with higher rates among single men (The U.S. Conference of Mayors, 2001).

- In Burke County's count in 2008 25% (293) listed substance abuse as a disability

homeless veterans

Conservatively, one out of every three homeless men who is sleeping in a doorway, alley or box in our cities and rural communities has put on a uniform and served this country. According to the National Survey of Homeless Assistance Providers and Clients (U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness and the Urban Institute, 1999), veterans account for 23% of all homeless people in America.

- The number of veterans identified in Burke County the 2008 Point-In-Time snapshot was 12%.

domestic violence

34% of cities surveyed by the U.S. Conference of Mayors identified domestic violence as a primary cause of homelessness (U.S. Conference of Mayors, 1998). Nationally, approximately half of all women and children experiencing homelessness are fleeing domestic violence.

- In 2008, 7% of the homeless counted were victims of domestic violence.

disabilities

Many respondents indicated having multiple disabilities or disabling conditions. Mental health, substance abuse, untreated dental problems, and medical issues were common disabling conditions as self-identified by the respondents. Three individuals identified themselves as Deaf using American Sign Language as their primary mode of communication.

chronic homelessness

The chronically homeless must be homeless more than one year OR more than three times in three years AND have a disability. Research shows that the longer a person is homeless, the more detached from society they become. Multiple issues prevent them from acquiring stability. Safe housing is a critical step toward restoring this stability.

- Ten percent of the homeless that were counted during the 2008 Point-In-Time count were considered chronic.

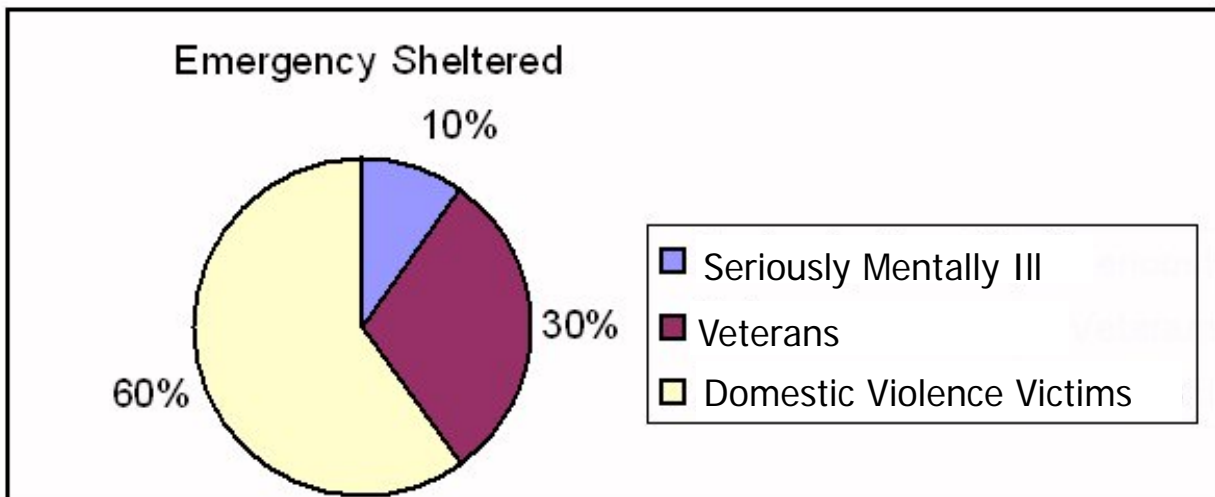
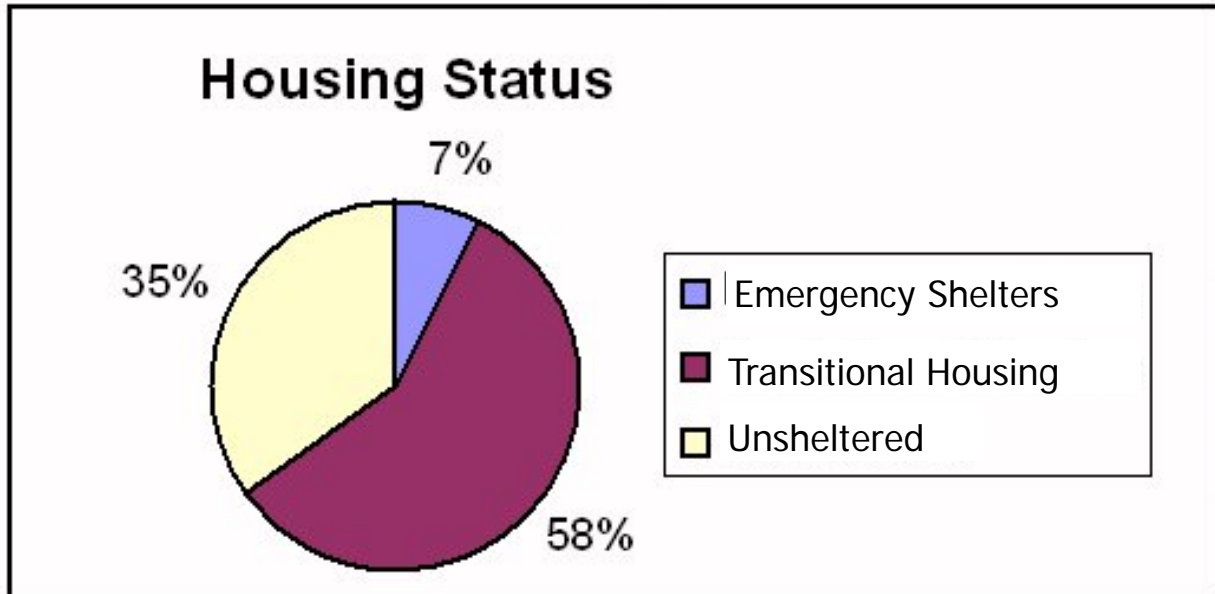
factors associated with moving out of poverty

	Escaping Poverty (%)		Remaining in Poverty (%)	
	1995-2000	2000-2005	1995-2000	2000-2005
Health				
Illness	4.0	2.5	10.5	11.9
Health Costs	2.0	2.5	4.8	13.1
Prescription Costs	2.0	2.5	1.0	2.4
Accidents	2.0	0.0	3.8	1.2
Disability	6.0	0.0	7.6	4.8
Employment				
Full Time	32.0	30.0	21.0	10.7
Temporary	4.0	15.0	1.0	2.4
Part Time	4.0	2.5	1.0	2.4
Extra (Second/Third)	6.0	15.0	1.9	1.2
Own business	6.0	7.5	1.0	0.0
Spouse's Job	4.0	5.0	1.9	3.6
Promotion	10.0	15.0	10.5	9.5
Financial				
Good Budgeting	14.0	25.0	10.5	8.3
Inheritance	0.0	7.5	1.0	0.0
Family				
Marriage	14.0	15.0	1.9	2.4
Family Assistance	6.0	22.5	17.1	27.4

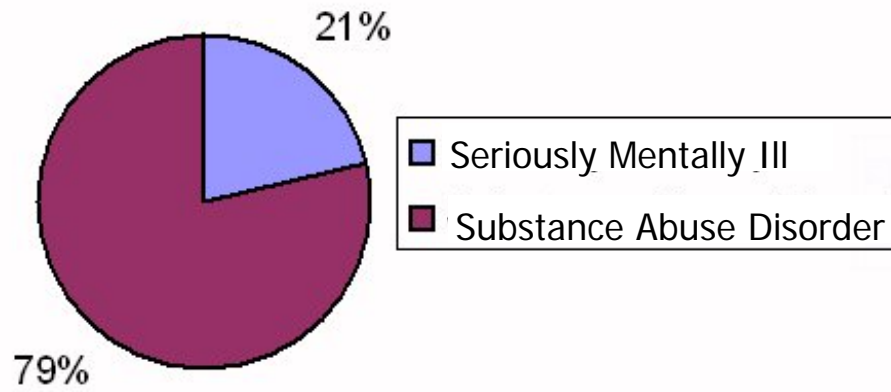
Escaping Poverty and Becoming Poor in 13 Communities in Rural North Carolina;
Terry Sanford Institute of Public Policy, 2006

Current Homeless Housing Status

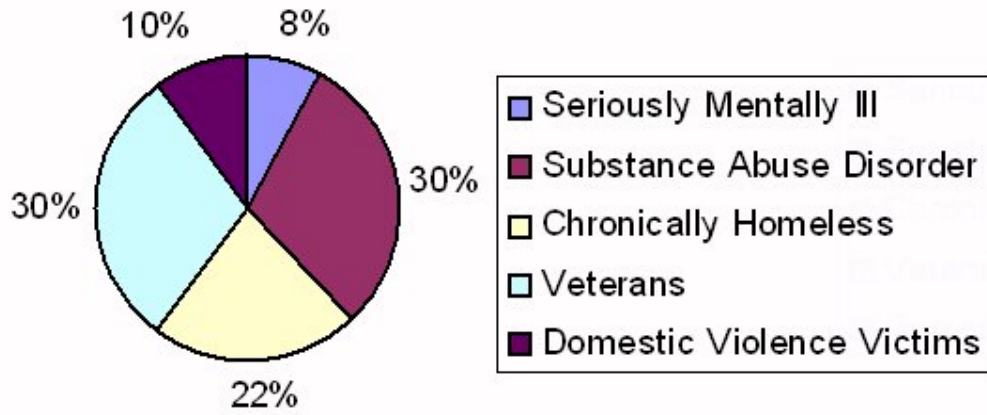
Homeless people who sleep in areas that are not designed for human habitation, as well as, transitional and emergency shelters were surveyed in the 2008 Point-In-Time count. Housing for the homeless is indicated below:



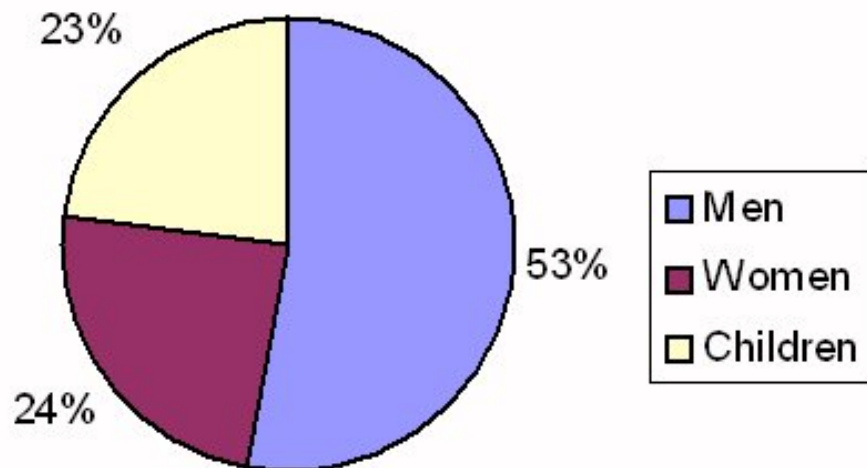
Transitional Sheltered



Unsheltered



Gender



Variables Impacting Burke County

Burke County's homeless numbers may be impacted by a number of varying factors which should be considered when interpreting the data:



"We helped build this country and we have no place to sleep. That's not right."

-James Thompson

- Burke County is dissected by the Interstate-40 highway. This corridor is heavily traveled linking Hickory, NC to Asheville, NC and points east and west. There is a small percentage of people who become stranded along this route without means and resources.
- County areas outside of Morganton are characterized by a decentralized population with three 'cultural centers' – Glen Alpine, Drexel and Valdese. Homelessness in these communities is hard to pinpoint because of this decentralization and the rural nature of the area.
- There are people living in substandard housing, in doubled up living arrangements, or camped on private property, but they are hard to find and a close approximation of the homeless is difficult to quantify.
- Within some populations, families that are doubled up don't see themselves as homeless – it's simply seen as "taking care of family". These numbers are difficult to quantify unless they are receiving services where their living arrangements are documented.
- It appears that seasonal workers do not remain in Burke County in significant numbers in the off-season. Counts done in spring or fall might reveal better data concerning this population and show the impact of seasonal workers as they transition into and out of the labor pool.

Conclusions

This report concludes that there are at least 148 people are homeless in Burke County at this (January 29, 2008) given point in time. It is important to note that this number is based on the definition of Homelessness established by the US Department of Housing and Urban development (HUD.) The definition includes people who stay in temporary shelters or live in public space not fit for human habitation but not those who are homeless and "doubling up" in habitable places.

- 41% of homeless people have not secured transitional housing in the county.
- 10% of homeless people in Burke County avoid shelters and

survive on the streets and fit the HUD definition of chronically homeless.

- 23 % of homeless people in Burke County are children.
- Thirteen percent (13%) of the homeless have at least one child in their direct care. Almost all of these families have found their way into the shelter system. Only 1% of the homeless on the streets have children with them.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The information gathered about public services usage is valuable data for determining the true cost of homelessness to a community. Further, this information will benefit agencies and local planners in developing strategic approaches for addressing the Federal and State plan to end homelessness. Due to almost certain underreporting, it is recommended that this question be examined more closely using focus groups at emergency shelters and meal sites.

The Continuum of Care consists of non-profit governmental agencies. These entities have convened to organize the Point-In-Time count for the past two years. It is recommended that this group expands its participants to include the widest possible array of agencies that provide services to the homeless and to those at risk of homelessness. It is further recommended that this group organize itself to provide a larger footprint in the homeless community. A roundtable or conference is recommended to increase community awareness and involvement.

It is the final recommendation of this report that city and county planners work closely with non-profit helping agencies to join other cities in our state in developing a strategic plan to end homelessness.

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