

A HOME FOR EVERYONE

Whatcom County Coalition to End Homelessness 2015 Annual Report

Part A: Point-in-Time Census of Homeless Residents

Part B: Youth Homeless Count

Part C: Public School Students and their Families

June 2015

Sponsored by:

Whatcom County Health Department

City of Bellingham

Whatcom County Coalition to End Homelessness

Whatcom Homeless Service Center at Opportunity Council

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Executive Summary

Homelessness in Whatcom County

At any point in time, at least 651 people in Whatcom County are homeless. Throughout the year, hundreds more face the prospect of losing their homes due to economic reasons, family break up, mental illness, drug or alcohol abuse, and domestic violence. 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 2015 homeless count

This year more than 50 people participated in the homeless count, which occurred on January 29. 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 of 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:

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

Who are the people experiencing homeless?

The 2015 homeless population is as diverse as the larger community population: they are old and young, male and female, unaccompanied individuals, and families. Some are residing in sheltered settings, while others are, literally, without a roof over their heads. Of those counted this year:

- 74% of homeless households included only one person
- There were 92 families with children that included 270 persons; the median¹ family size was 3 persons

In terms of age and sex:

- 51% of all homeless persons were female
- Ages ranged from less than one year old to 73 years old
- Median age of all homeless persons was 32 years
- Median age of unaccompanied homeless persons was 45 years

¹ 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. The following statistics are for youth we encountered who are literally homeless.

- 165 persons under 18 years old were counted, or 25% of all homeless persons
- 19% of all homeless persons were less than 10 years old
- 57 persons counted were 16 to 21 years old
- 94 persons were 16 to 24 years old
- 9 homeless minors (age 13-17) were unaccompanied

This year, we also conducted a special count of homeless youth that included minors and young adults ages 18 to 24 who were either literally homeless or unstably housed (e.g. couch surfing with friends or relatives to prevent becoming literally homeless). This special youth count was conducted at the same time as the larger count. In this special count we encountered:

- 80 youth households
- 10 unaccompanied minors (nine who were homeless and one who was unstably housed)
- 22 young adult families with children
- 0% of minors and 34% of young adults were unsheltered
- 44% of youth had a self-reported mental health disability
- 20% of youth identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or queer

Community re-entry

Homeless Count survey respondents were asked if they had been discharged from an institution within the last six months. Altogether, 96 (21%) household respondents said they had been released from jail or prison, inpatient substance abuse, mental health treatment, or juvenile detention.

- 14% of household respondents had been released from jail or prison (N=62)
- 6% had been released from inpatient substance abuse treatment (N=25)
- 5% had been released from a psychiatric hospital (N=21)
- 1% had been released from juvenile detention (N=6)

Shelter

Homeless survey respondent households told us where they had slept the previous night:

- 25% in transitional housing (N=113)
- 30% in emergency shelter² (N=133)
- 28% out of doors (N=124)
- 14% in a vehicle (N=63)
- 3% in a structure lacking basic amenities (N=15)
- <1% in an abandoned building (N=1)

Chronic homelessness

Based on HUD's definition of chronic homelessness, **116 persons** were chronically homeless. 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

² Emergency shelter includes 17 households who stayed in a motel using an emergency assistance voucher.

significant decrease from 2008 when 158 chronically homeless persons were counted.³ 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 four or more 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).

The number (and percent) of 449 counted households with any of the HUD chronic homelessness characteristics include:

- 271 (74%) unaccompanied, single individuals
- 181 (40%) who had been homeless for 12 months or more
- 56 (13%) who have had four or more episodes of homelessness in the last three years
- 267 (60%) households including a person with a disabling condition
- 336 (75%) who slept in a place not meant for human habitation or in emergency shelter

Trends

Compared to the baseline year of 2008 when our community began implementing the 10-Year Plan to End Homelessness, the number of people who were literally homeless decreased by 24%. We also note there was a 9% decrease in homeless families with children since our baseline year; however, there was a year-over-year increase of 10 families compared to last year. The number of homeless veterans decreased by 54%, and the number of chronically homeless persons decreased 27%. The number of persons who were homeless and re-entering the community from jail, prison, psychiatric hospitals, inpatient substance abuse treatment, and juvenile detention increased this year compared to last year, but since our 2008, people with this characteristic has decreased by 4%. There has been little movement in the number of people encountered during each annual Count who are unsheltered. However, few of the people we encountered are the same people we encountered in previous years.

This is the first year we can report the proportion of people we encountered who were also encountered in previous homeless counts. Altogether, 13% of the homeless households we encountered in 2015 were also encountered in 2014, 6% were also encountered in 2013, and 5% were also encountered in 2012. In other words, 5% of the homeless households we encountered in 2015 have been continuously homeless for at least three years, OR, they have been housed and become homeless again during that time interval.

³ 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.

Acknowledgments

Counting people who are experiencing homelessness for the annual Point-in-Time Count is not an easy assignment. Successful PIT Counts in Whatcom County are made possible because of the commitment we receive from the service organizations, community volunteers and members of the Coalition to End Homelessness.

This year was no exception; an overwhelming number of individuals and organizations assisted with the 2015 PIT count.

Thank you to all of you who gave your time and effort.

Finally, we would like to thank the individuals and families who responded to this year's PIT Count survey. We understand that we are asking you some difficult questions and asking you to share a part of your very personal story. Without this information, we would know very little about the complexities of homelessness or how we, as a community, should respond.

Part A: Point-in-Time Census of Homeless Residents

Introduction

At any point in time, at least 651 people in Whatcom County are homeless. Throughout the year, hundreds more face the prospect of losing their homes due to economic reasons, domestic violence, family break up, lost job, and mental illness. Hundreds of students in our schools have unstable housing; as a result, their academic performance may suffer and they are likely to have lasting impacts from this adverse childhood experience. People released from psychiatric hospitalization and incarceration face challenging community re-entry issues. Furthermore, the recent recession, the painfully slow recovery, and associated high 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.

Report format. This marks the seventh year of our community's efforts to implement its 10-Year Plan to End Homelessness. This year we use this reporting opportunity for four purposes, each embodied in a separate section of the report:

Part A: Point-in-Time Count Homeless Census contains the results of our annual census of individuals and families who are, literally, homeless. For the second time this year, we untangle what has been a rather confusing mixture of population estimates. In the past, those estimates attempted to combine data from single, point-in-time estimates of people who are, by definition, homeless with data from the public schools using a very different definition of homelessness and cumulative, rather than point-in-time estimates. This year's point-in-time count is consistent and comparable with past years' methods to measure people who are, literally, homeless at a single point in time.

Part B: Youth Homeless Count describes the results of a focused effort during our regular point-in-time count to locate youth and young adults under 25 years old who are either literally homeless or who have unstable housing and are at risk of becoming literally homeless. This effort was carried out in collaboration with Washington State Department of Commerce and U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.

Part C: Homelessness of public school students contains cumulative estimates of public school students who are unaccompanied or part of families who are either experiencing a housing crisis or are literally homeless over the course of a complete school year. The data come from school district Readiness to Learn staff who help students and their families who are experiencing a housing crisis and report data to the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI).

Part D: Coordinated Homeless Housing Services contains a description and diagram depicting the coordinated system of services that anyone may encounter who is having a housing crisis in Whatcom County. This section also includes some of the new performance measures that Whatcom Homeless Service intends to regularly report to the community.

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 29.

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 and measure progress toward goals.

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

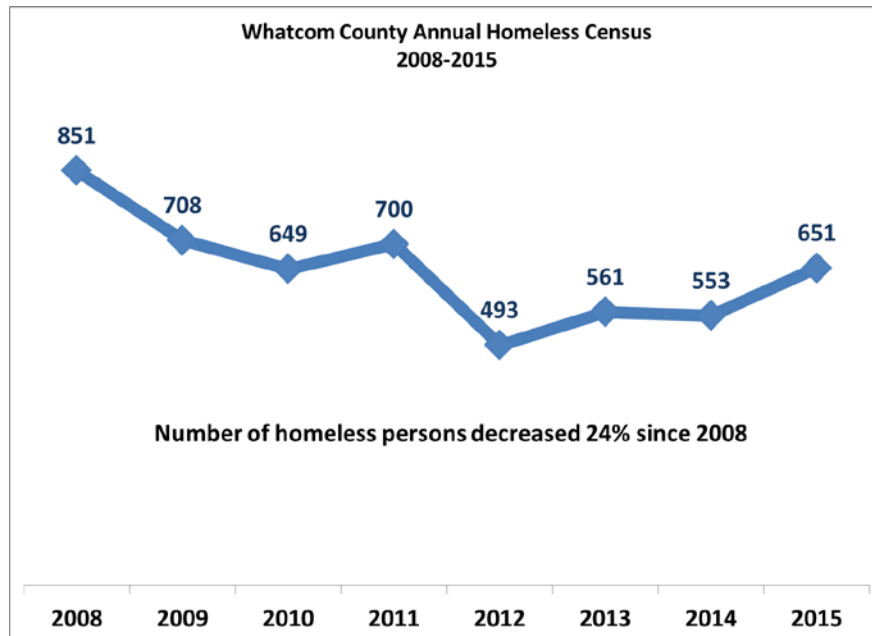
National research indicates that point-in-time counts generally underestimate the number of those who are homeless because:

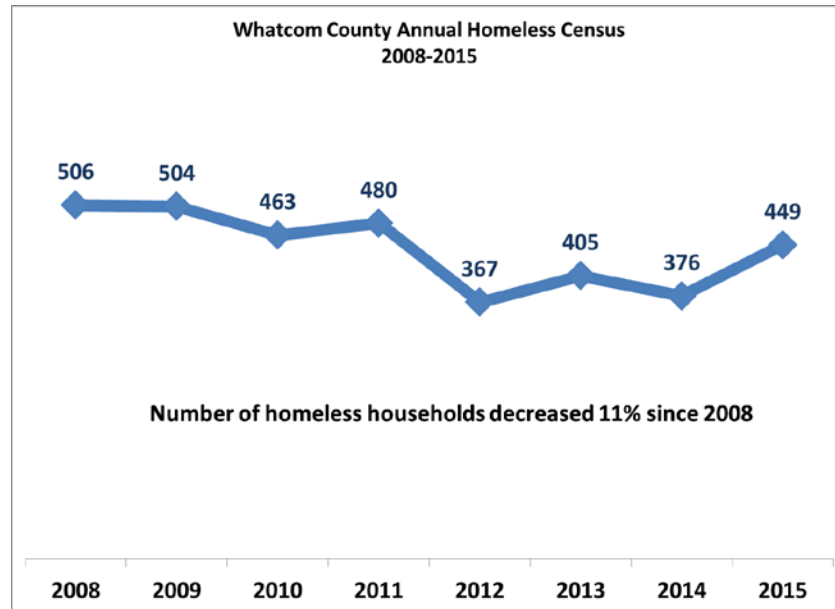
- A point-in-time is just a “snapshot” and may not capture all those who are cycling in and out of homelessness over the course of a specific period of time (e.g. annually). Furthermore, an annual “snapshot” may miss any seasonal fluctuations that may occur in our communities.
- It is difficult to find 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

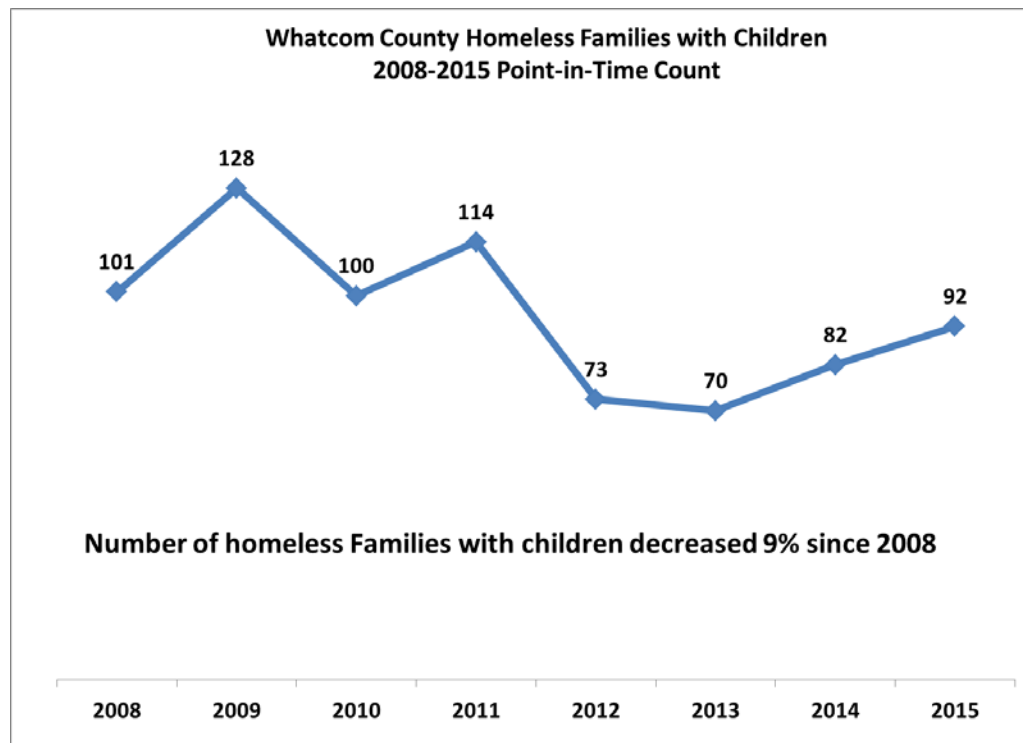
At a single point in time in late January 2015, a total of **651 persons** were homeless in Whatcom County. They were members of **449 households**. For the purpose of this homeless count, households were divided into two categories: *sheltered* and *unsheltered* individuals and families. Sheltered homeless persons stayed in emergency shelter or in transitional housing on the night before the Count. Unsheltered persons stayed outdoors, in cars, or other places not meant for habitation on the night before the Count.

Overall, there has been a 24% decrease in the number of homeless persons since 2008 and a 11% decrease in homeless households. However, the year-over-year change between 2014 and 2015 was a 17.7% increase in homeless persons encountered. The year-over-year change in number of homeless households was a increase of 19.4% (from 376 homeless households in 2014 to 449 in 2015).





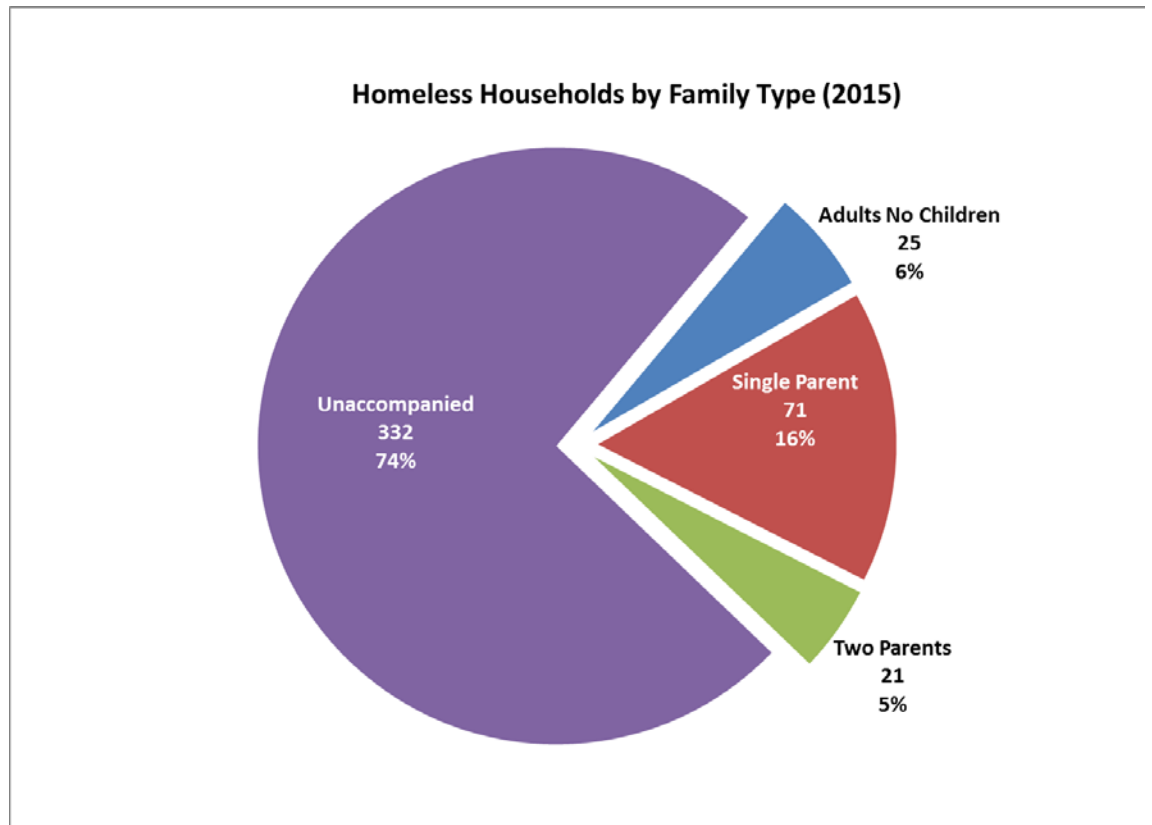
Overall, there has been a 9% decrease in the number of homeless families with children since 2008. However, the year-over-year change between 2014 and 2015 was an increase of 12%, from 82 families in 2014 to 92 families in 2015.



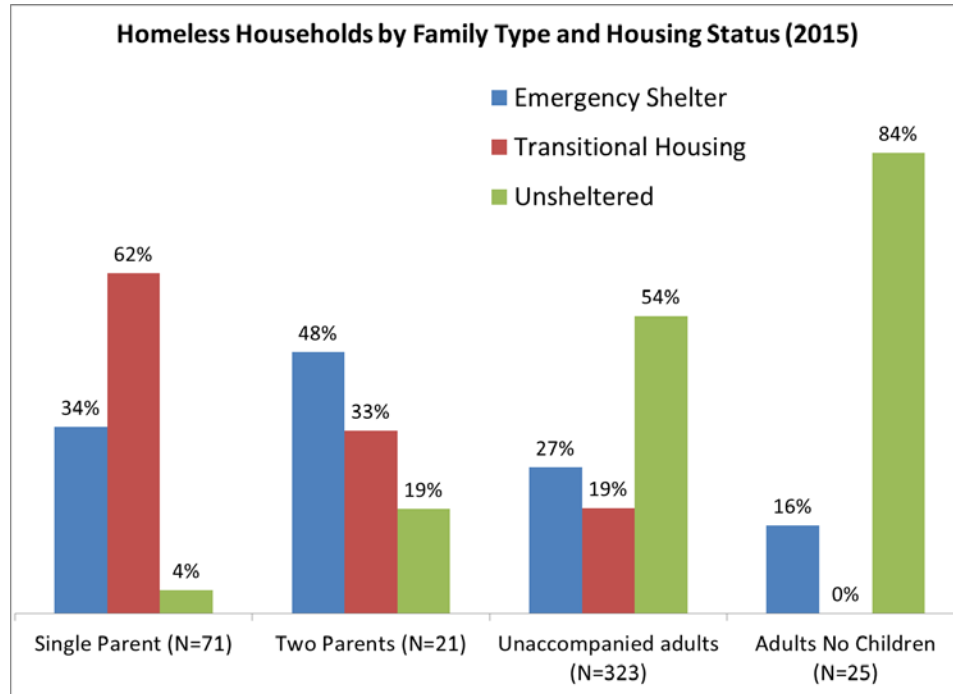
Characteristics of homeless persons and families

Household size and family status

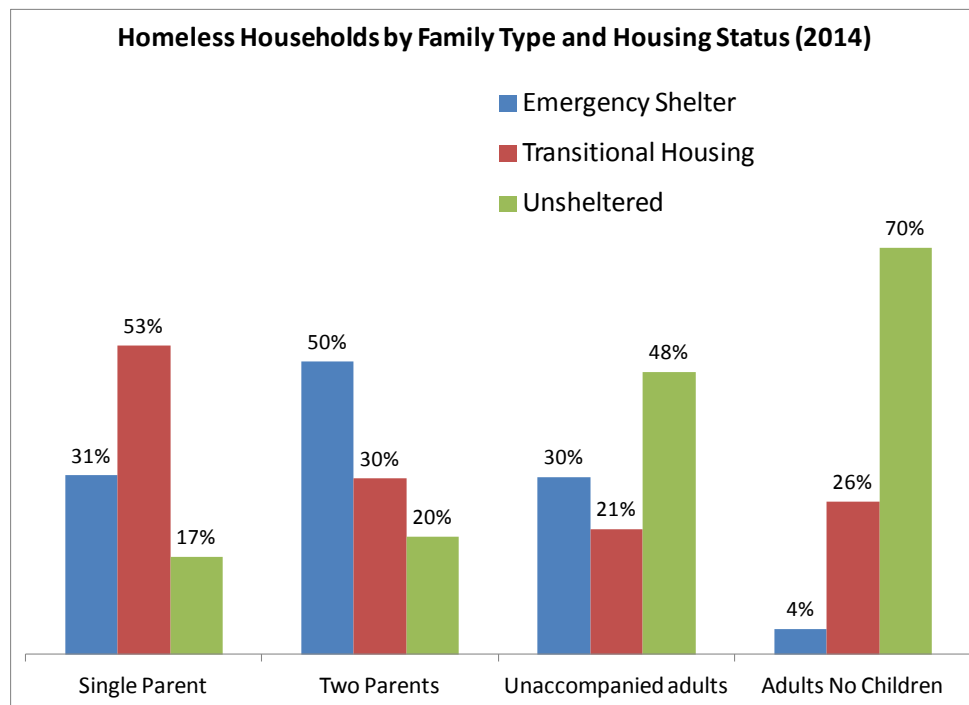
Of the 449 homeless households counted, 332 (74%) were unaccompanied adults. There were 25 (6%) family households with no children. A total of 92 (21%) families with children were counted, most of whom (71) were single-parent families; 21 (5%) families had both parents present. Nine unaccompanied minors were encountered this year.

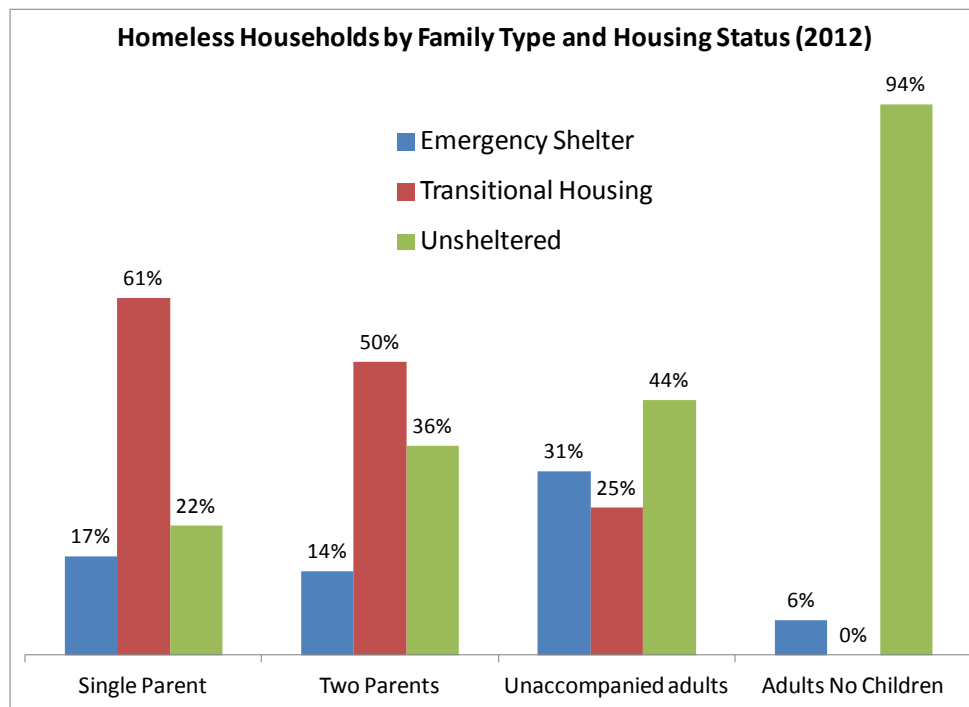
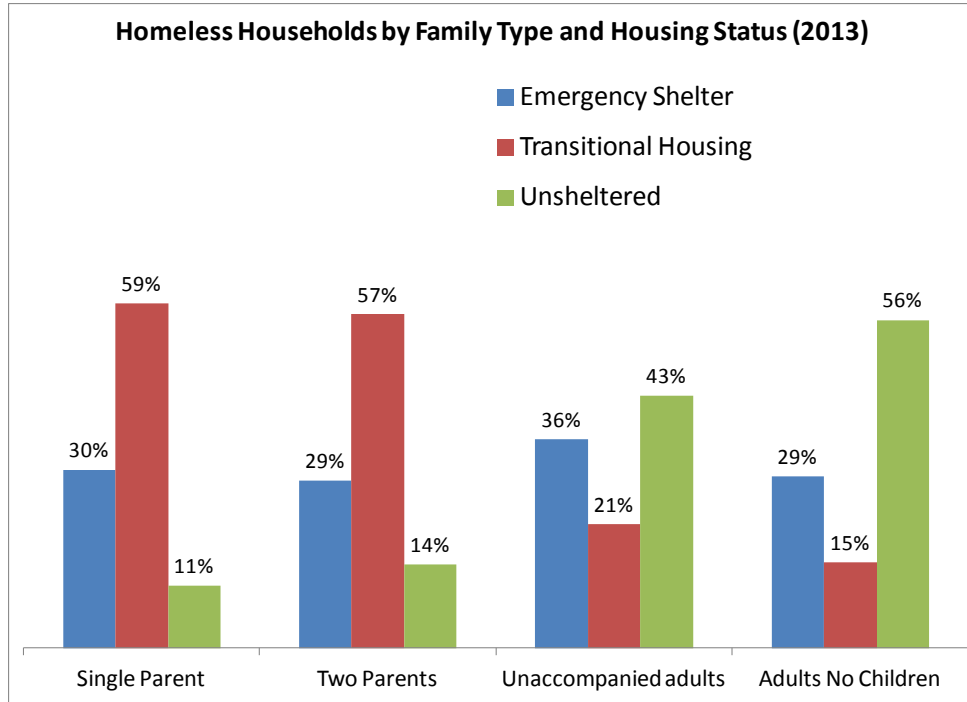


Compared to last year, higher proportions of households without children were unsheltered this year. For example, 54% of unaccompanied adults this year. Compared to 48% in 2014. However, for families with children, the proportion of unsheltered was similar to last year for two parent families, but significantly lower for single parent families (only 4% this year, compared to 17% in 2014).



*the graph above does not include the nine unaccompanied homeless minors.



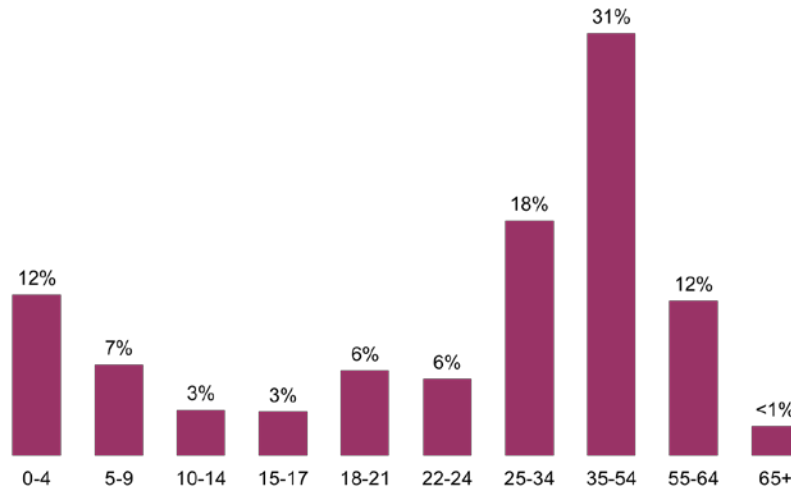


Age and sex

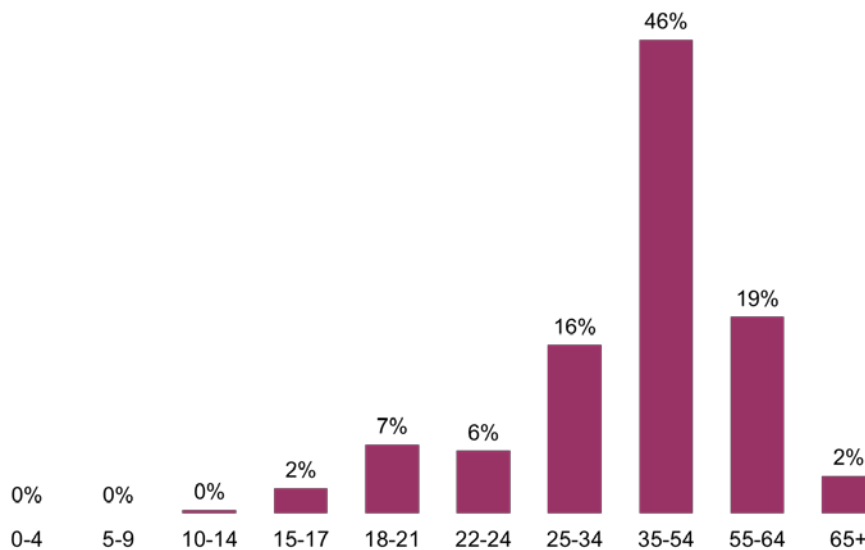
Homeless persons were almost evenly divided between males (49%) and females (51%). Ages ranged from less than one year old to 73 years old. The median age of all homeless persons was 32 years. 19% of all homeless persons this year were children under 10 years old, and 25% were under 18 years old.

The median age of unaccompanied homeless persons was 45 years. Nine unaccompanied minors were encountered during this year's Count. Almost half (46%) of unaccompanied homeless persons were in the 35-54 years age range.

Age Distribution of All Homeless Persons (2015)



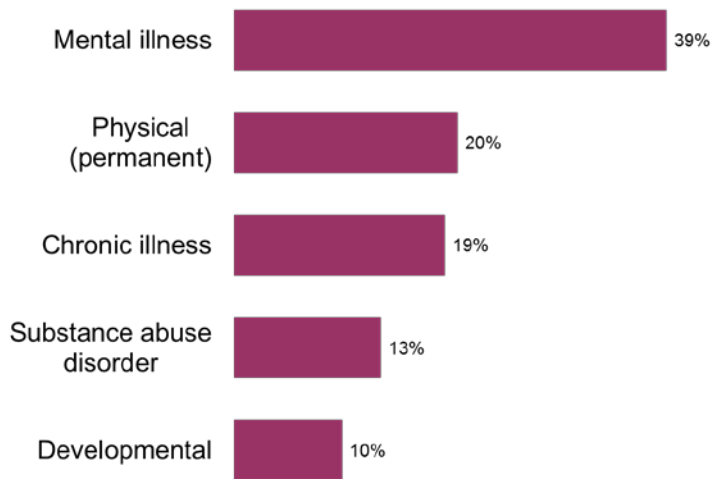
Age Distribution of Unaccompanied Homeless Persons (2015)



Disabling conditions

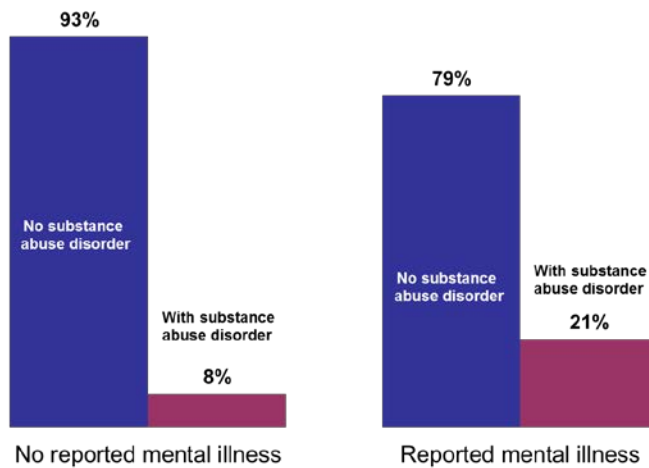
Homeless count survey respondents were asked to list which of five disabilities applied to each member of their household. The most prevalent disabling conditions were mental illness (39%), permanent physical disabilities (20%), Chronic illness (19%), substance abuse disorders (13%), and developmental disability (10%). It should be emphasized that the data below on prevalence of disabling conditions is based on self-reporting. Due to the stigma of mental illness and substance abuse, these conditions are almost certainly under-reported.

Homeless Persons With Disabling Conditions (2015)



Additional analyses showed that a substantial number of homeless persons face the challenges of co-occurring disorders. About 1 in 5 (21%) persons who reported having a mental illness also reported having a substance abuse disorder.

Homeless persons with mental illness are highly likely to have a co-occurring substance abuse disorder (2015)



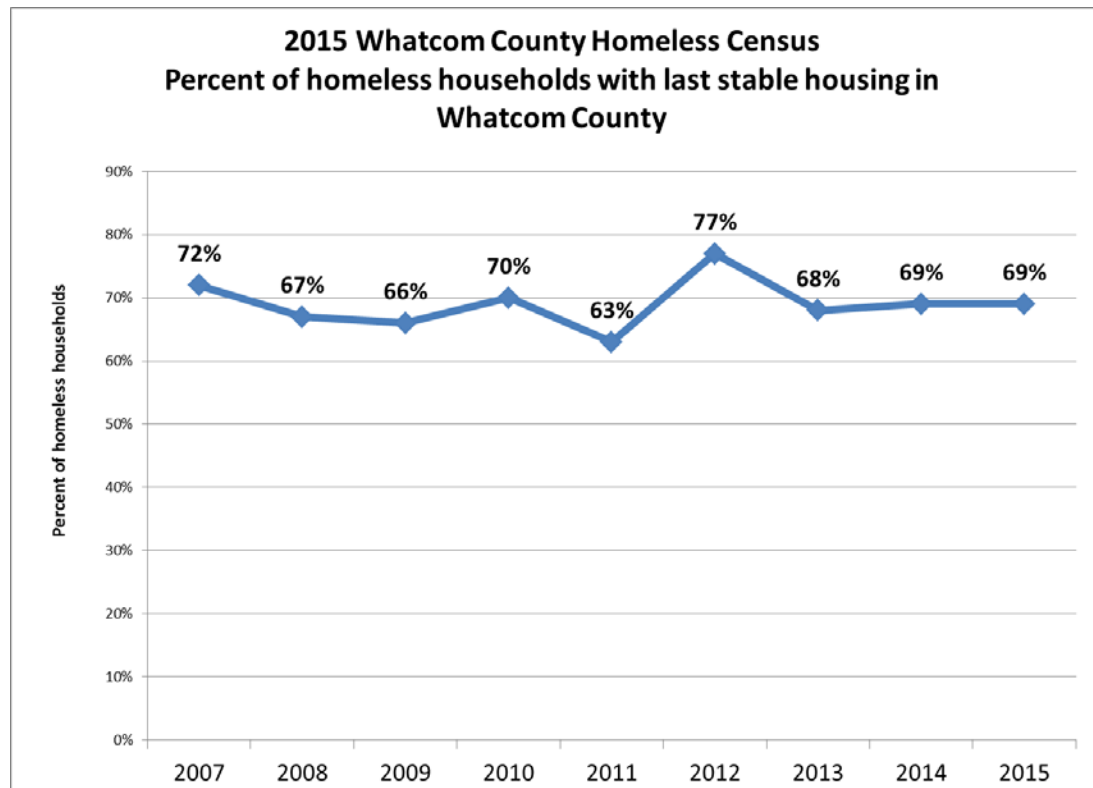
Characteristics of homelessness in Whatcom County

69% of the counted homeless persons had their last episode of stable housing in Whatcom County.

Geographic distribution: location of previous residence

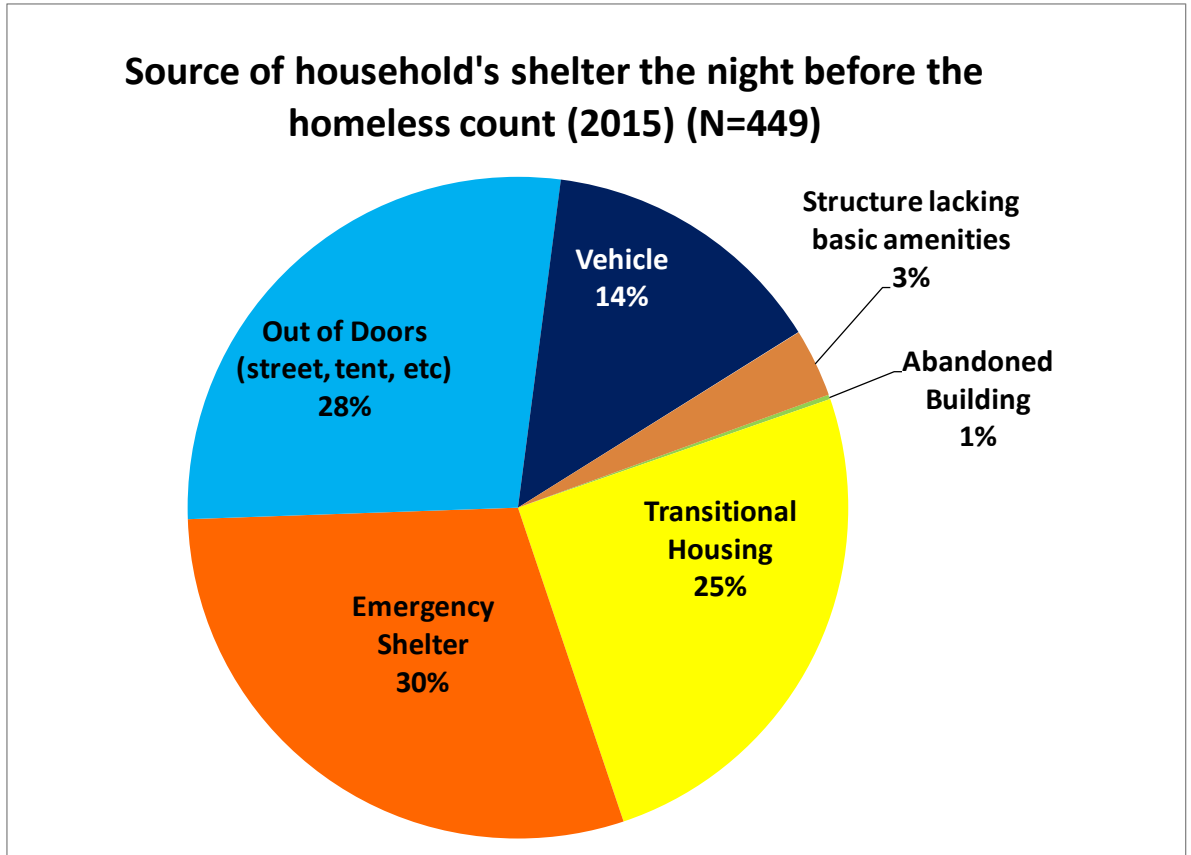
About two-thirds of homeless households had their last stable housing in Whatcom County. That statistic has been fairly stable since before our community began major new investments toward ending homelessness. Some people think that adding more housing services will attract homeless people from other locales, but the data do not support that assumption.

Close to half of households (46%) who reported that their last stable housing was in Whatcom County said they had previously lived in Bellingham. The next most frequent locations were Ferndale, Maple Falls, Blaine, and Lynden.



Sources of shelter

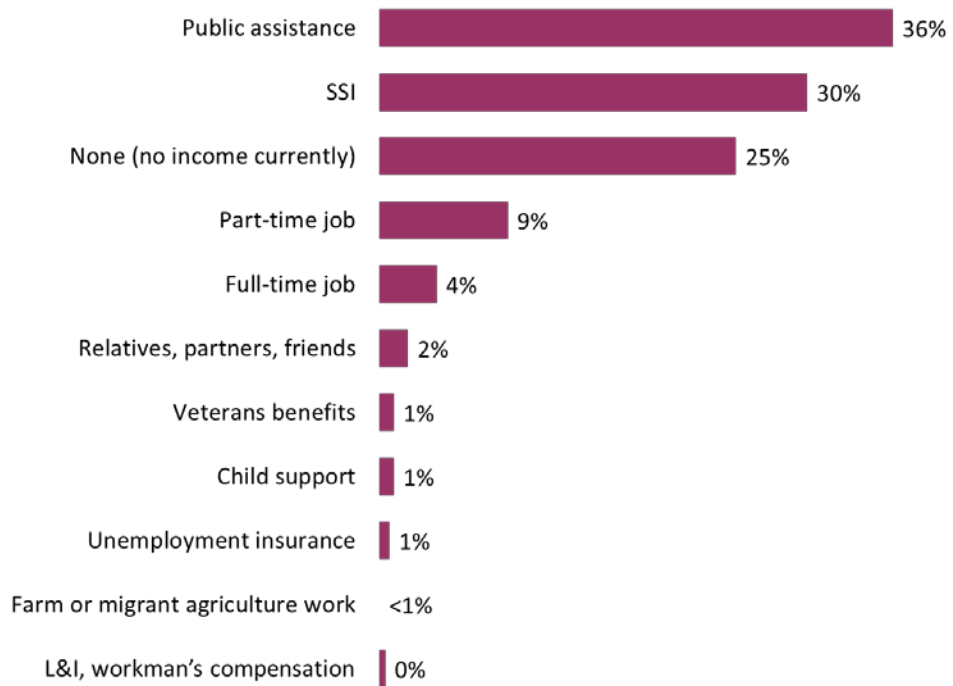
In 2015, more than half (55%) of all homeless households were sheltered; 30% stayed in emergency shelter, which might have been a motel if they were receiving a “voucher” or financial assistance to stay there, and 25% were living in transitional housing. Less than half (46%) of homeless households were unsheltered. They stayed the night before the Count out of doors (28%), in a vehicle (14%), in a structure lacking basic amenities (3%), or in an abandoned building (1%).



Sources of income

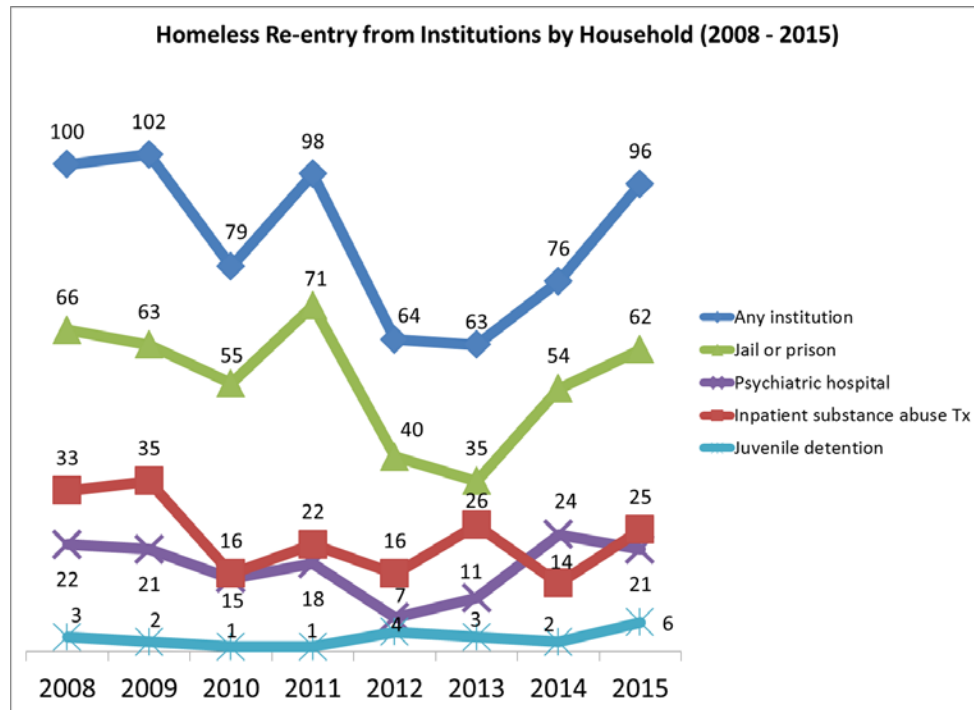
One in four (25%) of homeless households reported having no income at all. The most common income sources reported by homeless households in 2015 were public assistance (36%) and Social Security including SS, SSI, or SSDI (30%). Only 13% of households reported income from any type of employment.

Income Source by Household (2015)



Community re-entry

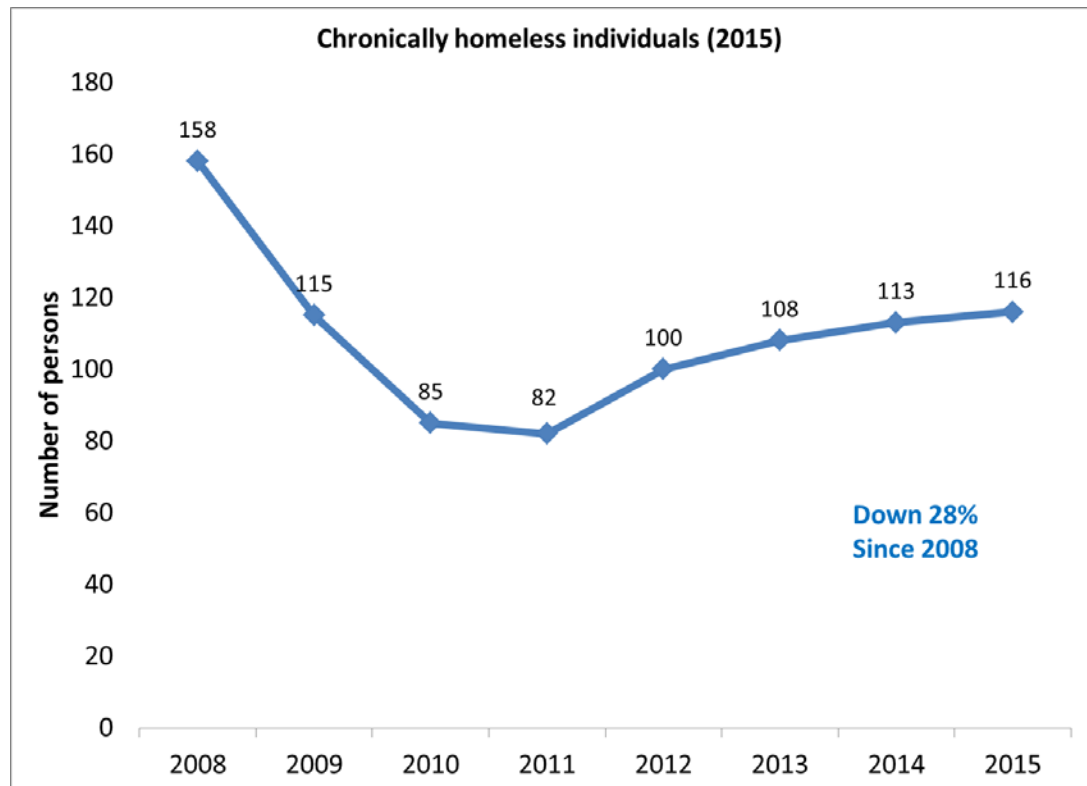
Homeless Count survey respondents were asked if they had recently re-entered the community after being discharged from a residential institution within the last six months. Altogether, 96 (or 21% of all homeless households) said someone in their household had recently re-entered the community after release from jail or prison, inpatient substance abuse, psychiatric hospital, or from juvenile detention. Compared to our base year of 2008, this is a 4% decrease in the number of homeless re-entry cases. However, compared to last year, there were increases in homeless re-entry from jail or prison, inpatient substance abuse treatment, and juvenile detention.



NOTE: A few 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 2015, 96 persons had a total of 114 releases (62+21+25+6 = 114)

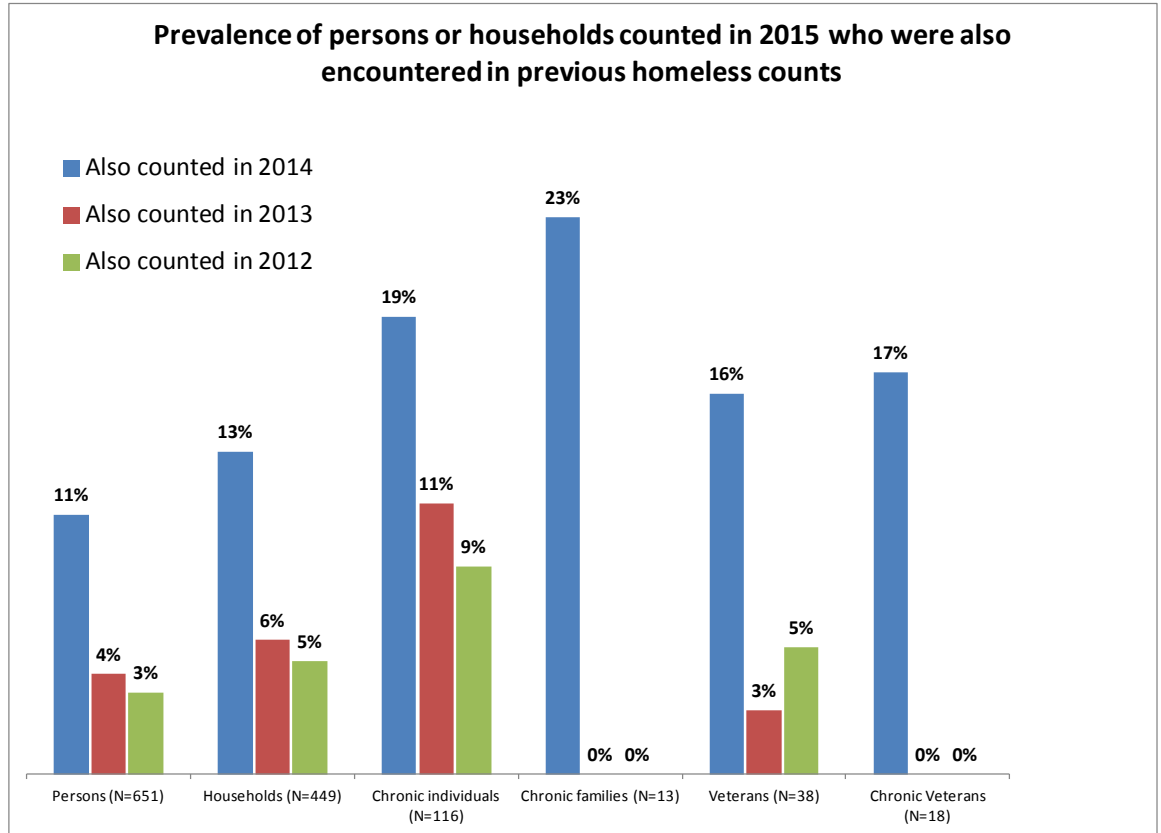
Chronic homelessness

Based on HUD’s definition, **116 unaccompanied persons, or 26%** of all 449 homeless households were chronically homeless. As in previous years, this is almost certainly an undercount since some survey respondents do not supply enough information to determine whether or not they meet all of the HUD chronic homelessness characteristics (see paragraph below chart). Nevertheless, it is a decrease from 2008 when 158 chronically homeless persons were counted. However it departs from a trend of steady decreases in chronic homelessness from 2008 to 2011, a time during which our community added significant new permanent supportive housing units. To get back on the downward trend, there will need to be new housing resources developed, such as Catholic Housing Service’s forthcoming Cornwall Apartments slated for occupancy of 42 units of permanent supportive housing in summer 2015, and Greggie’s House, a Sun Community project that added six more units of permanent supportive housing in May of 2014.



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).

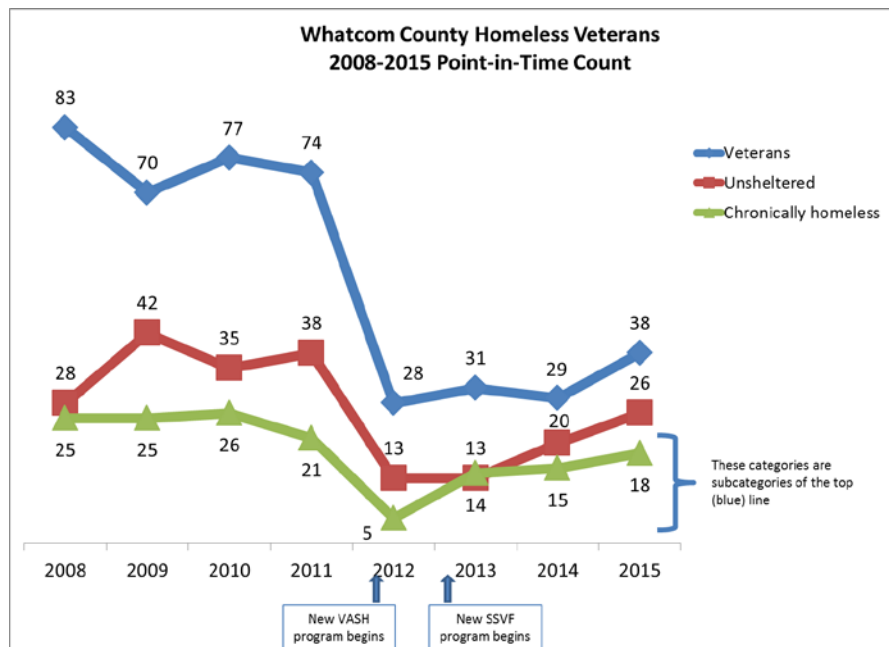
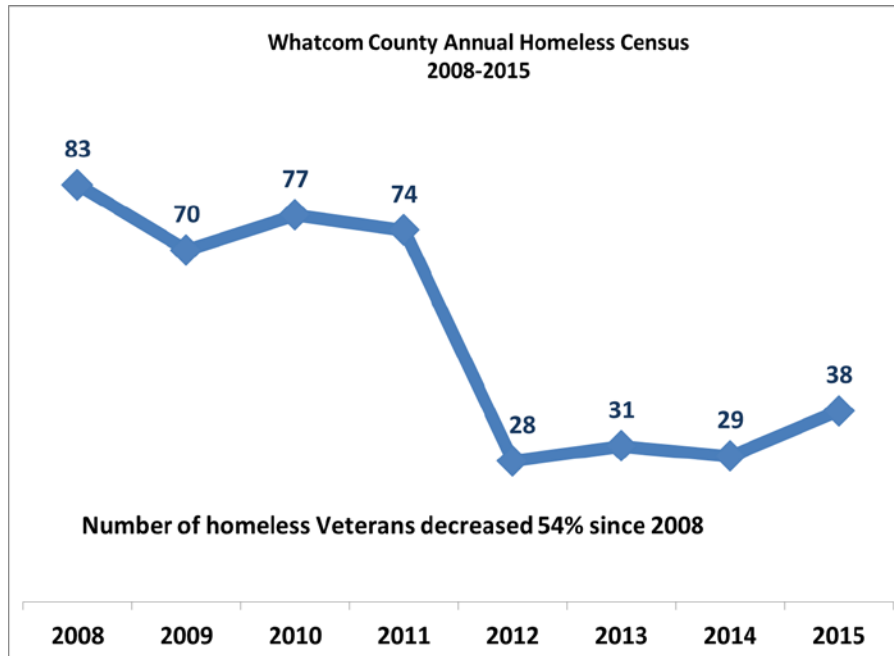
Altogether, 13% of the homeless households we encountered in 2014 were also encountered in 2014, 6% were also encountered in 2013, and 5% were also encountered in 2012. In other words, 5% of the homeless households we encountered in 2015 have been continuously homeless for at least three years, OR, they have been housed and become homeless again during that time interval.



Homeless Veterans

Over just the last three years, nonprofit service providers and Whatcom County government devoted an unprecedented effort toward ending homelessness among local Veterans.

Since 2008, the number of chronically homeless veterans encountered during the annual homeless census has decreased 54%. This year we encountered 38 homeless veterans, 26 of them were unsheltered, and 18 of them were chronically homeless.



Part B: Youth Count! 2015

A special focus to develop a better understanding of youth homelessness

The U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH) and the Departments of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), Health and Human Services (HHS), and Education (ED), launched Youth Count!, an interagency initiative to develop promising strategies for counting unaccompanied homeless youth, up to 24-years-old, through innovative implementations of HUD's 2013 Point-in-Time (PIT) count. The Youth Count! Initiative was developed per a recommendation from the national framework for ending youth homelessness. We chose to continue this effort in Whatcom County in 2015 as we continue to learn more about the phenomenon of youth homelessness.

The Youth Count for Whatcom County was similar to the regular Point in Time count in the way volunteers were recruited and how the count training was structured. However, the Youth Count differed in other ways: a specialized youth focused interview form was used; and outreach was targeted to locations where youth were likely to be camping, and unlike our regular Point-in-Time Count, for the Youth Count, we included youth who are in unstable, doubled-up situations to prevent becoming literally homeless.

Types of Youth Count Households

All young people aged 14-24 who were not dependents or otherwise associated with another family household were included in the Youth Count. Altogether, we encountered 80 youth households; 10 of them consisted of minors (under 18 years old) with no adults in the household, and 70 had a young adult (aged 18-24) as head of household.

Most of these households (56 of 80) were single, unaccompanied individuals; 22 households were families with children, and two youth households consisted of families without children (e.g. couples).

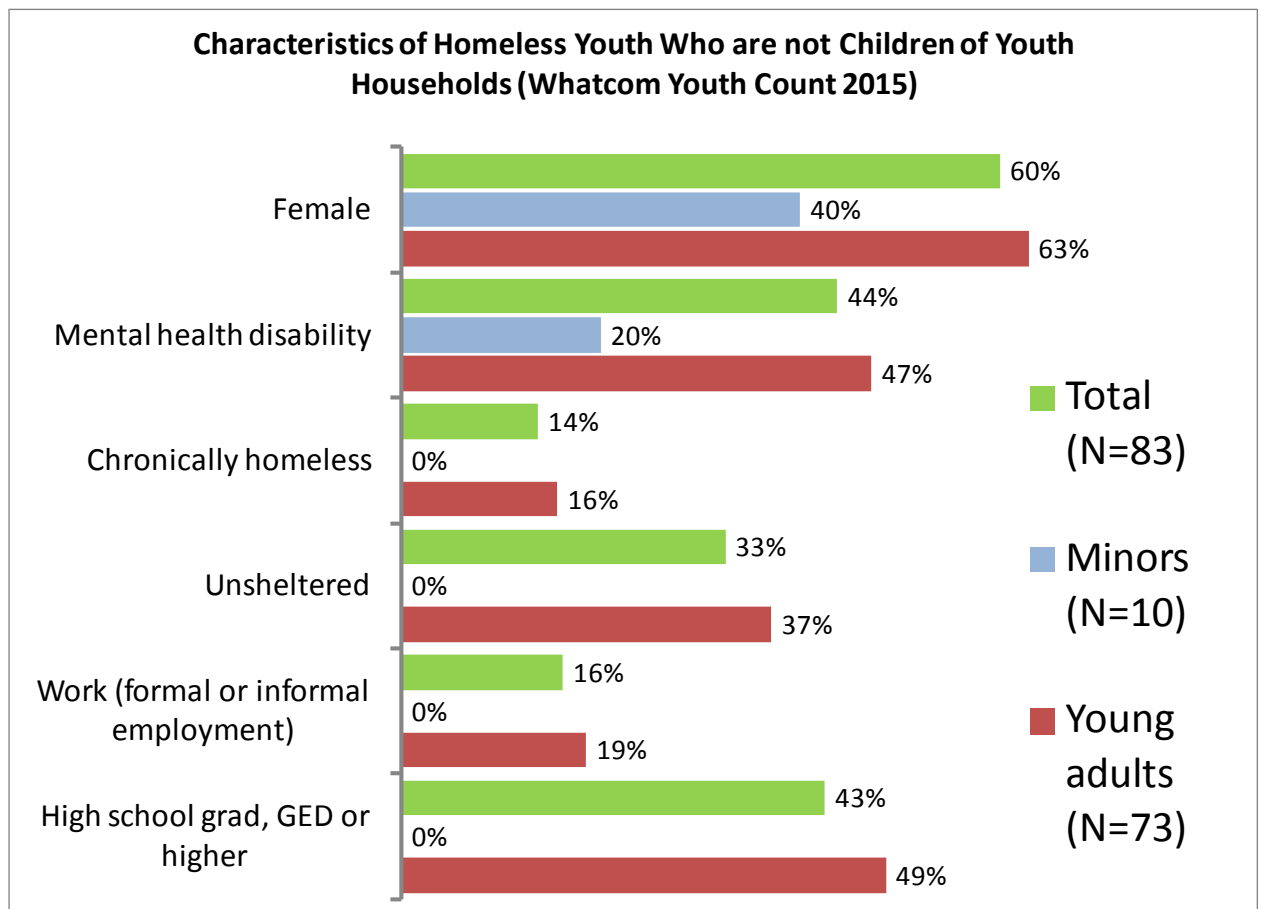
Within these 80 households were 110 persons, about half of whom (56) were single, unaccompanied individuals. There were 23 young adults (ages 18-24) in families with children; and 27 children who were part of those families. Only four people were in households that we categorized as families without children.

Total Youth Count of unaccompanied youth households age 14-24	80
Minor heads of household	10
Young adult heads of household	70
Total Household type	80
Families with children	22
Families without children	2
Single, unaccompanied households	56
Total Youth Count number of persons	110
Young adults in families with children	23
Children in families with children	27
Persons in families without children	4
Singles	56

Characteristics of minors and young adults who are not children of Youth Count Households

There were 83 persons counted in Youth Count households that were not children of parenting households. This section describes the characteristics of those persons.

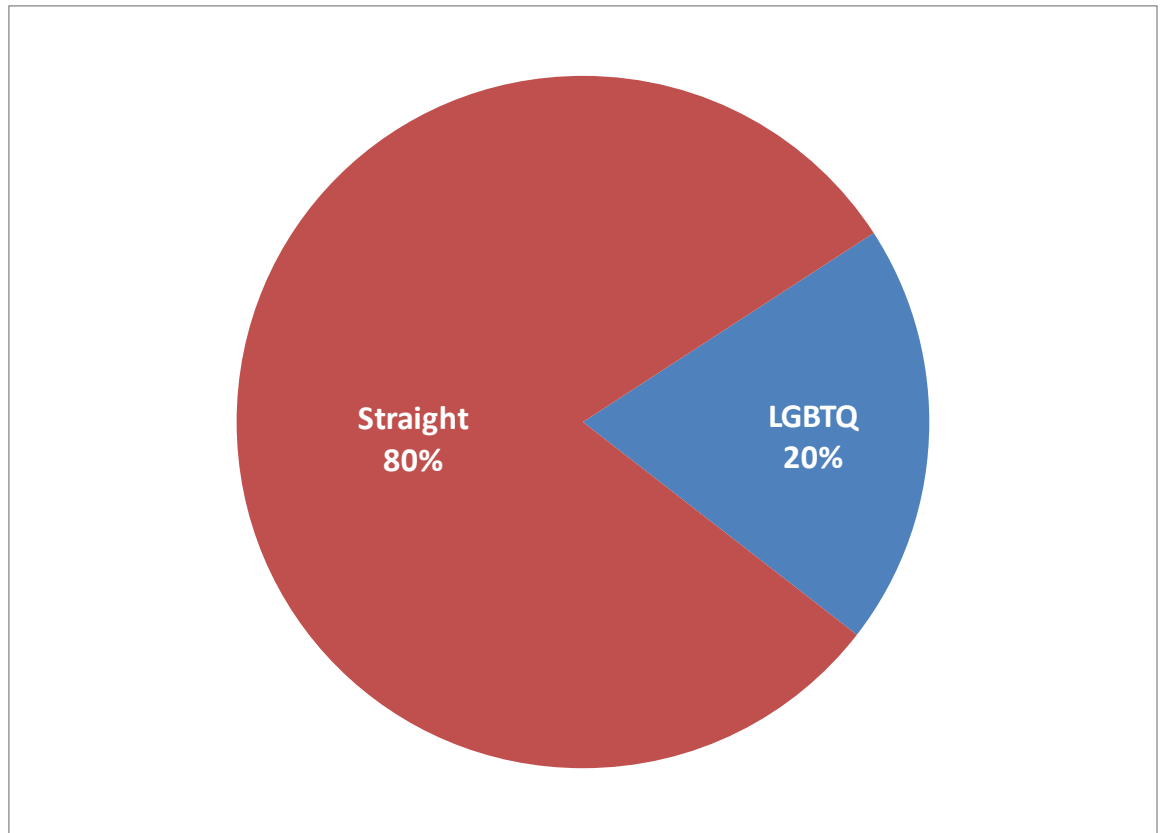
Most (73) of the 83 persons were young adults ages 18-24; the rest (10) were minors, under 18 years old. There were more females (60%) counted as males among young adults but only 40% of the minors were female. Minors were less than half as likely (20%) as young adults (47%) to have a self-reported mental health disability. Minors were less than half as likely (20%) as young adults (47%) to have a self-reported mental health disability.



None of the homeless minors was deemed to be “chronically homeless”, meaning he or she has been homeless for at least one year or has been homeless repeatedly over the last three years, AND has a disability. Young adults were more likely than minors to be chronically homeless (16%). None of the minors were unsheltered, compared to about one in three (37%) young adults.

Young adults were more likely to be working for income (19%) compared to the minors we encountered (0%). About half (49%) of young adults had completed high school or a GED.

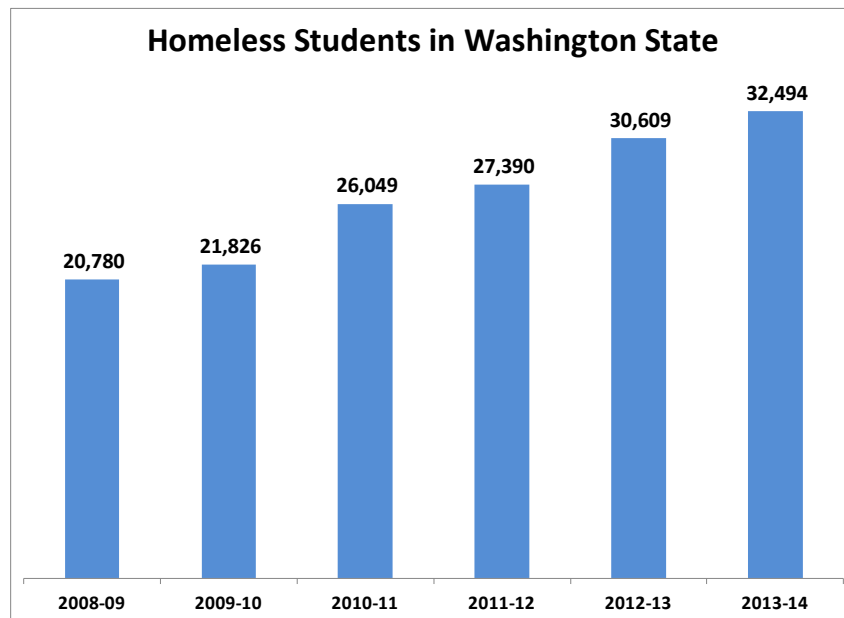
Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ) homeless youth make up a disproportionate number of the overall homeless youth population across the nation and in Whatcom County. Several population-based studies have estimated that three to five percent of youth in the United States are LGBTQ. On the other hand, research suggests that between 20 percent and 40 percent of all homeless youth identify as LGBTQ. The 2015 Whatcom County Youth Count found that 20% of youth who answered the sexual orientation question identified as LGBTQ (compared to 22% during the January 2014 Youth Count).



Part C: Homelessness of Public School Students

Number of homeless students in Washington State and Whatcom County public schools

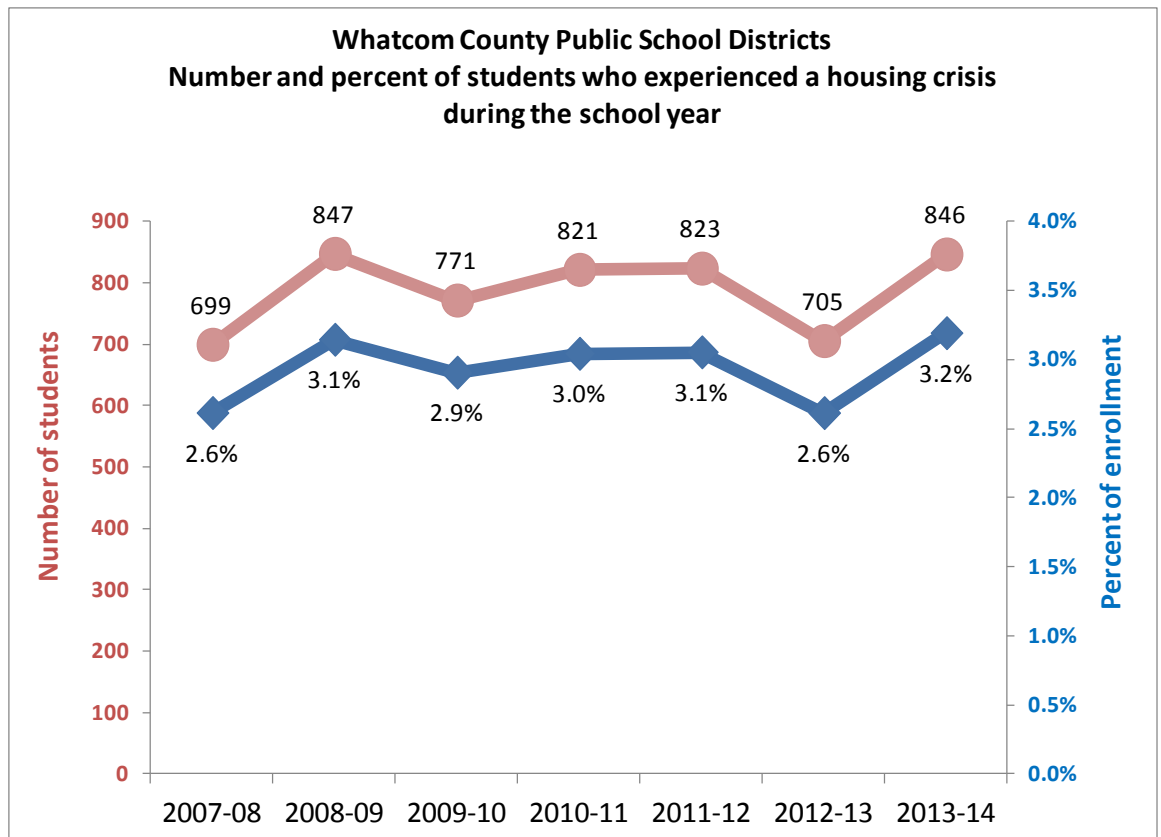
Beginning in 2004, the U.S. Department of Education required states to report data on homeless children and youth enrolled in all local school districts within their state as part of their Consolidated State Performance Report (CSPR). The following figure shows the increase in the number of homeless students enrolled in Washington State public schools between the 2008-2009 and the 2013-2014 school years. **There was an astounding 56% increase over this period and a year-over-year 6% increase between the last two school years** (Note that these figures reflect the definition of homeless children included in Subtitle VII-B of the McKinney-Vento Act⁴, a definition that is different than the one used by the homeless Point-in-Time Count).



Differences between Homeless Point-in-Time Count and Homeless Students in School data. School districts and the Washington State Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) report data on homelessness that is different than the countywide annual Point-in-Time (PIT) homeless count in two important respects. First, the Point-in-Time Homeless Count is a snapshot of homelessness on a single day in the community, whereas the data reported by schools are cumulative over the course of a school year. Second, the PIT count data include only people who are literally homeless, meaning those people who are unsheltered, in emergency shelter, or in homeless transitional housing. In addition to those three categories, school districts also report as homeless those children who are doubled-up with another family to prevent becoming, literally, homeless, and youth in temporary foster placements.

⁴ Individuals who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence including, children and youths who are sharing the housing of other persons due to loss of housing, economic hardship, or a similar reason; are living in motels, hotels, trailer parks, or camping grounds due to the lack of alternative adequate accommodations; are living in emergency or transitional shelters; are abandoned in hospitals; or are awaiting foster care placement; children and youths who have a primary nighttime residence that is a public or private place not designed for or ordinarily used as a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings; children and youths who are living in cars, parks, public spaces, abandoned buildings, substandard housing, bus or train stations, or similar settings; and migratory children who qualify as homeless.

Whatcom County public school homeless students. The emerging trend in Whatcom County is quite different than that depicted for the state as a whole on the previous page. Here, we observed a significant increase in homelessness among public school students after the 2007-2008 school year, then, during school year 2008-09 the data suggest a return to pre-recession levels. However, a surge in homelessness is evident between the 2012-13 school year and 2013-2014 (the most recent data available at the time of this report). In fact, the total number of homeless students in 2013-14 (846) is equal to the highest level recorded previously in the 2008-09 school year (847). Compared to the previous year (2012-2013), homelessness increased 20% in the schools in Whatcom County. As a percentage of school enrollment, 3.2% of students experienced homelessness during the 2013-2014 school year, which is the highest percentage recorded since 2007-08.



Public school homeless statistics by district. The charts below show the number of homeless students counted in each school district from 2007-08 to 2013-14 school years. Blaine, and Lynden saw sharp increases in homelessness between 2007-08 and 2008-09, but then leveled off or declined in subsequent years.

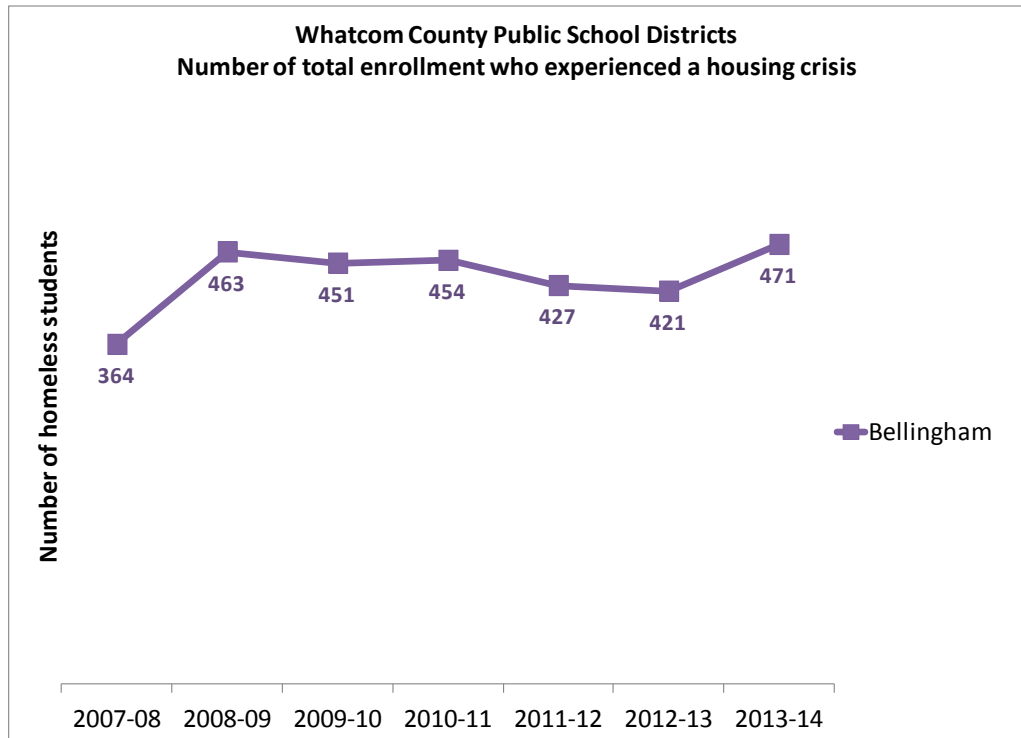
Bellingham followed that same pattern until the most recently reported period between 2012-13 and 2013-14 when homelessness increased 12% to 471 students.

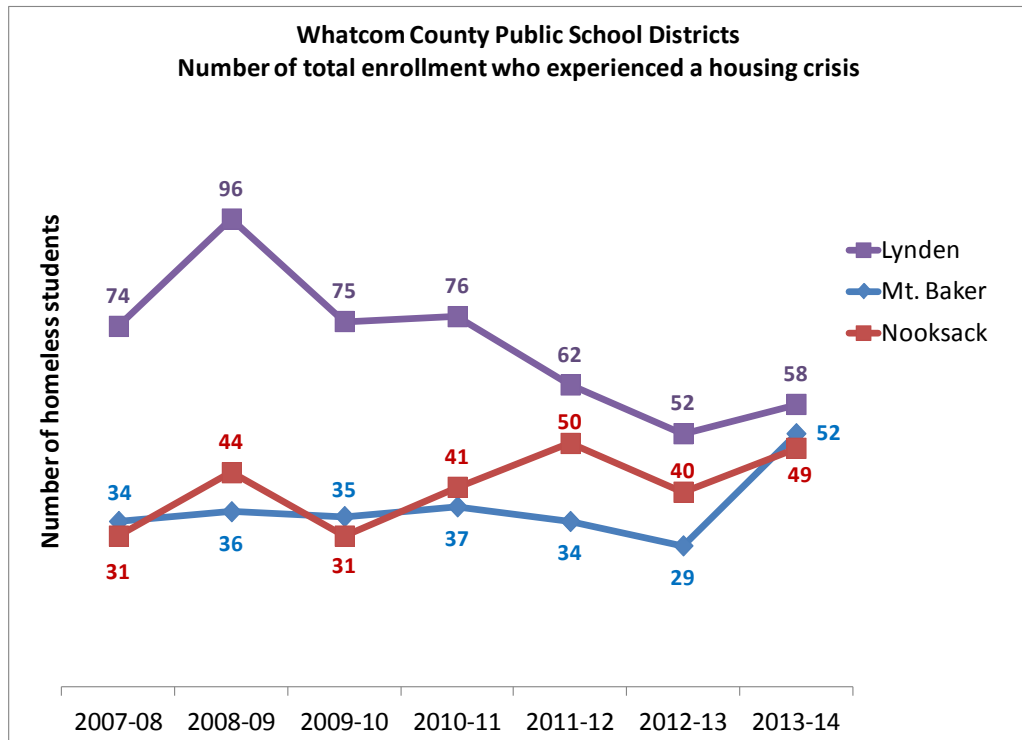
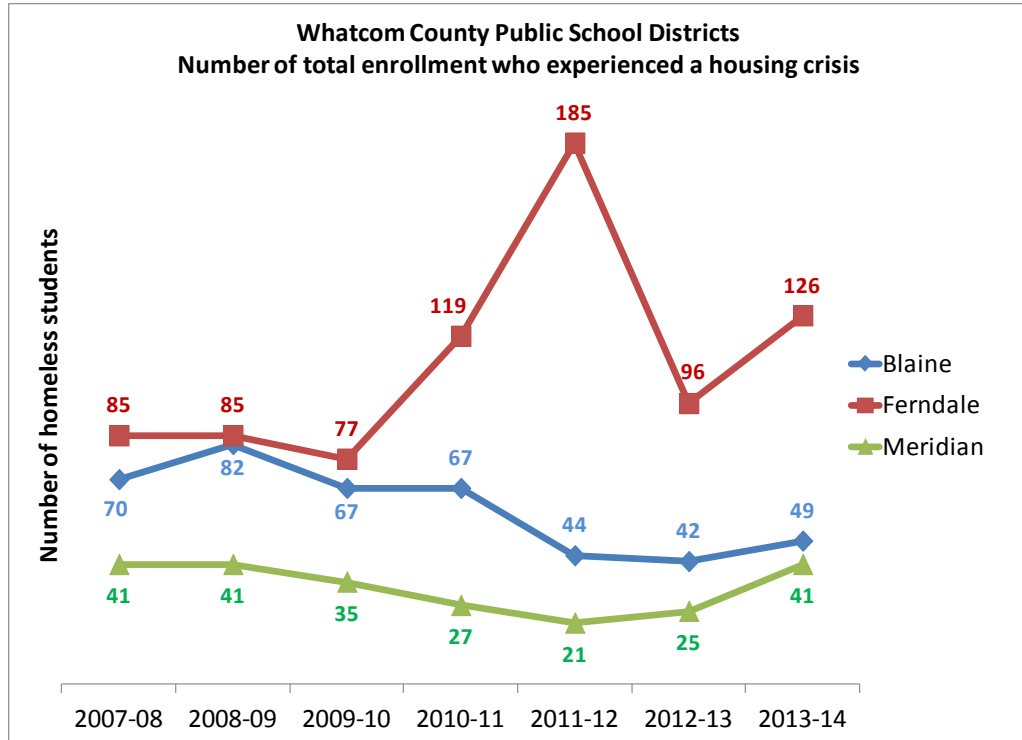
Ferndale reported a dramatic increase in homelessness that was not observed in the other districts between the 2009-10 and 2011-12 school years, followed by a significant drop between 2011-12 and 2012-13, which was, in turn, followed by another sharp increase in 2013-14.

Mount Baker also saw a sharp increase between 2012-13 and 2013-14, counting 52 students as homeless, a school district record high since 2007-08.

After measuring a steady decline in homeless students from 2008-09 through 2011-12, Meridian School District is now back up to its highest measured homeless student population of 41 as of the 2013-14 school year.

Nooksack School District is also showing an increase in homeless students during the 2013-14 school year compared to the year before.





Homelessness and academic achievement⁵

Basics tenets of the McKinney-Vento Act require school districts to be proactive in identifying homeless students and ensuring their immediate enrollment, even if they lack documents normally required for enrollment). The definition of homeless includes children and youth who “lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence”. Beyond this guiding phrase, the definition includes several examples of homeless living arrangements (see sidebar on previous page). Eligible students have the option of continuing to attend their school of origin (if feasible) with transportation provided by the school district upon request, even if they move outside their school of origin’s residential zone; or students may transfer to the local attendance area school. These same rights, including the right to immediate enrollment, extend to unaccompanied homeless youth, even if they are unable to provide proof of guardianship.

Under the McKinney-Vento Act, states are required to distribute a certain portion of their state’s homeless education allocation to school districts through a competitive subgrant process. Subgrant funds are awarded to facilitate the school enrollment, attendance, and success of homeless children and youth, and are based on the needs of the LEAs requesting assistance as well as the quality of their applications. School districts that apply for and receive McKinney-Vento subgrants may use the funds to provide tutoring and supplemental instruction, early childhood education, transportation, school supplies, professional development on homeless education issues for school and district staff, and other services that otherwise may not be provided by the public school program.

Homeless children not only have the adversity of poverty, they also must cope with the additional burden of homelessness. They are exposed to a plethora of risk factors which, in turn, can make them vulnerable to academic difficulties. Many research studies have found that homeless students routinely underperform when compared to the general student population.

While homelessness is certainly a risk factor for students, there is a broader constellation of risk factors experienced by homeless students and other students living in poverty that some researchers suggest may have a greater effect on student performance. These risk factors include: economic stressors, parental job loss, and parental financial distress; residential mobility; school mobility; crowding; and hunger and poor nutrition. Researchers also underscore the significance of cumulative risk, pointing out that many of the risk factors listed above often co-occur in the lives of homeless children, making it difficult to isolate the effects of each individual risk factor.

Despite the difficulty in separating the effects of poverty from those of homelessness, and the mixed results of studies comparing homeless and low-income children, it is clear that homeless children are a particularly vulnerable, heterogeneous subgroup of disadvantaged children who face numerous challenges in achieving academic success.

⁵ This section is excerpted from: Bowman, Dukes, and Moore. 2012. *Summary of the State of Research on the Relationship Between Homelessness and Academic Achievement Among School-Aged Children and Youth*. National Center for Homeless Education, Greensboro, NC.

Appendix A: Homeless count methodology

Methods 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. This is the second year during which we used the statewide Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) to collect data for many homeless individuals who were staying in transitional housing or emergency shelter.

Data processing begins when the paper survey questionnaires are delivered to the County's designated data analyst at the Homeless Service Center at the Opportunity Council, 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 respondents⁶. The cleaned data is then imported into special software to facilitate statistical analysis.

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.

⁶ 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.