

Burke County, North Carolina

**Final Report:
Burke County Point-In-Time Count of Homeless People**

January 29, 2009



Report prepared by David Collins
Point-in-Time Homeless Count Coordinator
To the Burke County Continuum of Care for the Homeless Committee
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If you have any questions regarding this report contact:

David Collins,
House of Refuge Ministries
P.O. Box 1371 , Morganton, NC 28655
www.refugeministries.us

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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 167 individuals counted in Burke County's 2009



"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,"

David Collins,
Executive Director
House of Refuge Ministries

Point-in-Time Count, 24% 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 and Cognitive Connections has moved to Hickory, there are successful clean and sober houses 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. 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 for-



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

US Council of Mayors

mer 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 2009

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 167 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. 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.



The 2009 Homeless Count cast a wider net, reached deeper into the community and did more individual interviews. The result was a more accurate snap shot of homeless people living in Burke County.

The Burke County Continuum of Care

The Burke Continuum of Care is a community-based cooperative that addresses the needs of homeless persons in order to help them reach maximum self-sufficiency. The Continuum of Care is developed through collaboration with a broad cross section of the community and based on a thorough assessment of homeless needs and resources. The Continuum of Care is recommended by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) as a comprehensive and strategic approach to addressing homelessness.

HUD Definition of the Continuum of Care:

"The Continuum of Care is a community plan to organize and deliver housing and services to meet the specific needs of people who are homeless as they move to stable housing and maximum self-sufficiency. It includes action steps to end homelessness and prevent a return to homelessness."

The Continuum of Care serves three main purposes:

1. It is a strategic plan for addressing homelessness in the community, based on the identified needs of homeless individuals and families, the availability and accessibility of existing housing and services, and the opportunities for linkages with non-homeless mainstream housing and service resources;
2. It is a strategic process to develop a broad based, community wide, year round initiative; and
3. It is an application to HUD for homeless-targeted housing and services resources.

Participating organizations

The Burke Continuum of Care conducted the 2009 Point in Time count and consists of the following agencies:

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



"I've paid taxes in Burke County all my life and now I have place to sleep. That's not just right."
 -Gary
 Burke County Resident

Health/Mental Health Providers

- Broughton Hospital
- Mental Health Partners
- Blue Ridge Health Care
- Vocational Rehabilitation

Transitional Housing and Service Providers

- UPLift Family Housing (BUCM)
- Flynn Christian Home
- St. Charles Catholic Church
- Meeting Place Mission
- Morganton Housing Authority
- Oxford House
- Red Cross

Housing Development

- Olive Hill Economic Development Corporation

Law Enforcement

- Burke County Sheriff's Department
- Morganton Department of Public Safety

Reentry Programs

- EGAP Ministries
- Repay, Inc.

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.

Point in Time Homeless Count Survey

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.
- **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.
- **Supportive housing** is a combination of housing and services intended as a cost-effective way to help people live more stable, productive lives. Supportive housing works well for those who face the most complex challenges
- **Shelter Plus Care** designed to provide housing and supportive services on a long-term basis for homeless and their families. 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.

- 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 2009 goals was to cast a wider net throughout the county by focusing on service points. In addition to the street count, volunteers conducted surveys at locations where the homeless frequent for services. The result was a dramatic increase in the number of survey's taken. More than an head count, this year's enumeration is the most accurate collection of data on Burke's homeless population.

collection strategy

The data collection included both street counts and service-based counts (establishing stations in a service location where it is known that homeless will be). The service-based stations were highly successful in locating and identifying the homeless. A significant increase in the number homeless participants who completed surveys greatly contributed to the quality of the information collected.

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



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

-Ricky
Burke County resident

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.

Survey Results

The January 2009 Point-in-Time Homeless Count results:

- 167 people were counted as homeless which represents a 12% increase from 2008
- 55% were male adults and 21% female adults
- 41% consisted of two or more persons identified as a family member with 24% of those being children.

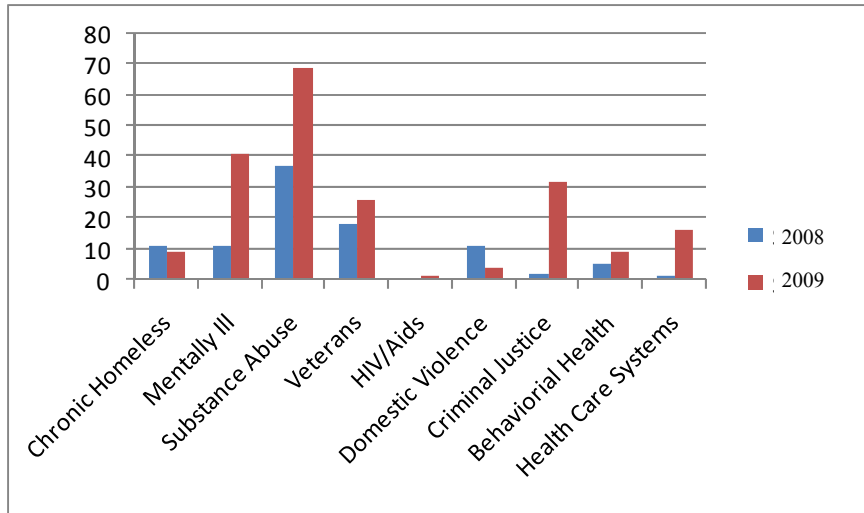
subpopulations

- 25% were identified seriously mentally ill
- 5% were identified as chronically homeless
- 42% had diagnosable substance use disorders
- 2% were victims of domestic violence
- 16% were veterans
- 18% were discharged during the previous 30 days from the criminal justice system
- 5% were discharged during the previous 30 days from the behavioral health system
- 10% were discharged during the previous 30 days from the health care system
- 70% of homeless people found were in seasonal, emergency or transitional shelters.
- 30% of homeless people in Burke County avoid shelters and survive on the street.
- 97% of the homeless people counted were Burke County citizens.

trends

The count indicated an overall increase of 12% in the last 12 months which mirrors the Burke County unemployment figures at that time. Two additional factors are of significant note when comparing the 2008 and 2009 statistics. The numbers of those HUD defines as chronically homeless fell by 18% while the numbers of families who were homeless increased by 75%. It should also be noted that the large number of sheltered homeless persons was due almost exclusively to the efforts of local churches operating under temporary zoning variances.

Trends 2008-2009



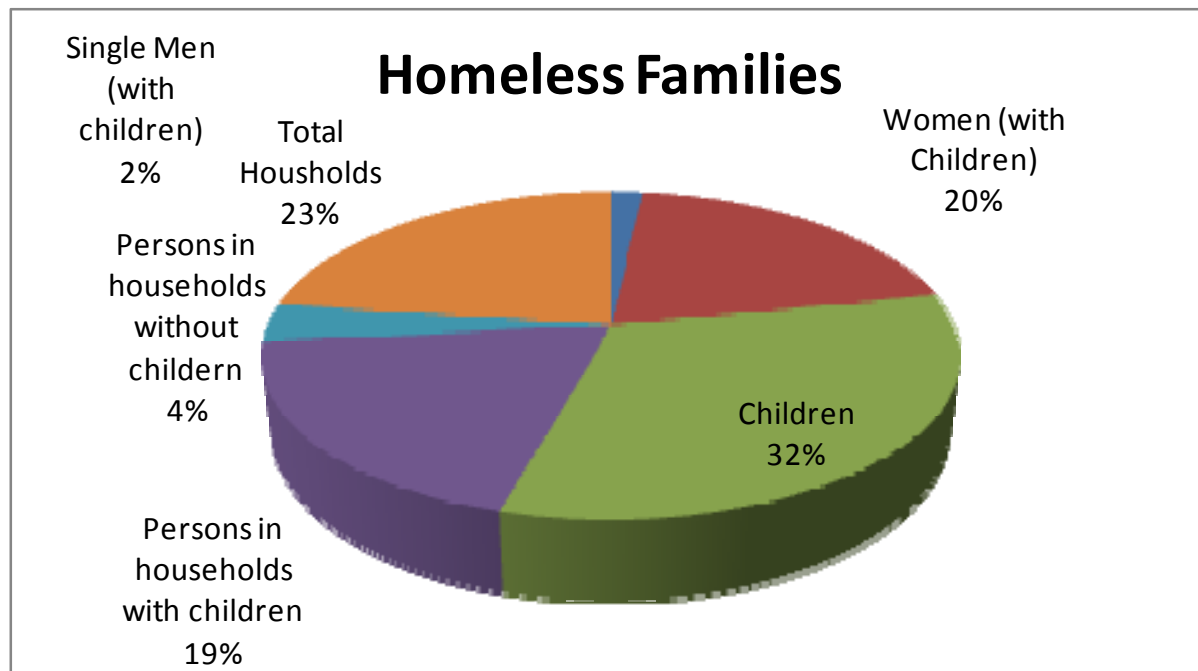
gaps in services

Burke County currently supports about 20 beds for transitional housing which, for the most part are program specific targeting drug and alcohol recovery. Additionally, there are six transitional units available for families. The current trends indicated by the Point In Time count point to six fundamental gaps in services.

- Resources that target homeless prevention (emergency rental assistance, short term support)
- Emergency shelter and services
- Sufficient units for women and families
- Transitional housing and reentry programs for ex-offenders
-

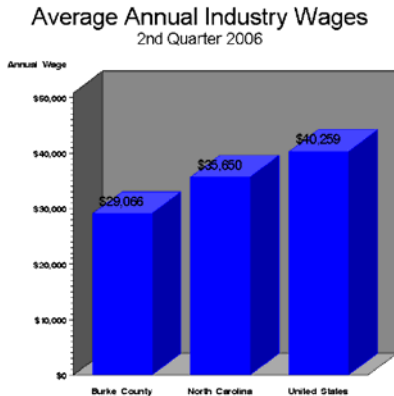
Reasons for Homelessness

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

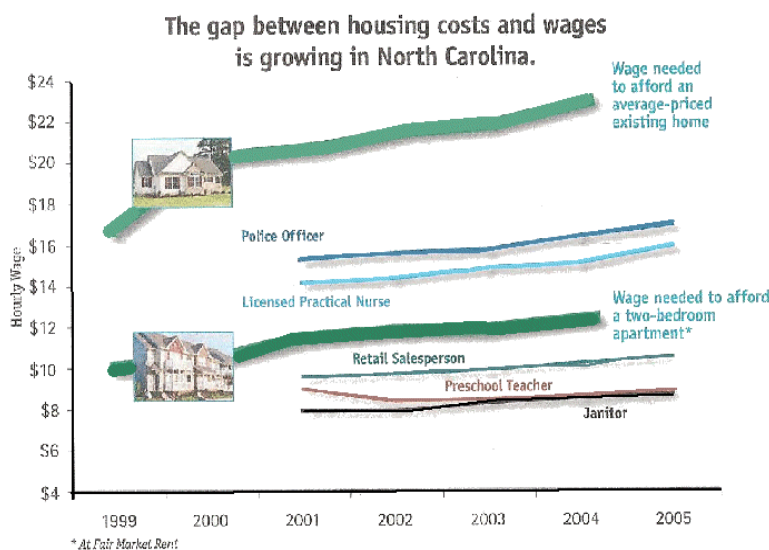
The median household income has *sharply declined* from the inflation-adjusted 2000 income levels in Burke County. The income level has *decreased* to \$32,963, representing a 20.9 percent *decline*. The poverty rate in Burke County, North Carolina has increased by 4.4 percent from the levels reported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





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

declines in employment

The increase in the levels of homelessness can be correlated with the five year decline in employment. Of the area's industries, the apparel knitting mills industry and furniture manufacturing industries have experienced the most substantial job losses. Unemployment is currently reported at 16%.⁷

foreclosures increase

Increasing levels of homelessness can also be correlated with the rising number of home foreclosures. There have been 1,559 foreclosures in the last three years which marks a 6.9% increase over the previous three years. However, the rate has skyrocketed 25% over this time last year with 284 foreclosures in the last 6 months.

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 25% of the homeless people surveyed during the 2009 Point-In-Time count were identified as being seriously mentally ill.
- 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.

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 2009 42% listed substance abuse as a disability



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

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 2009 Point-In-Time snapshot was 16%.

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 2009, 2% 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.

chronic homelessness

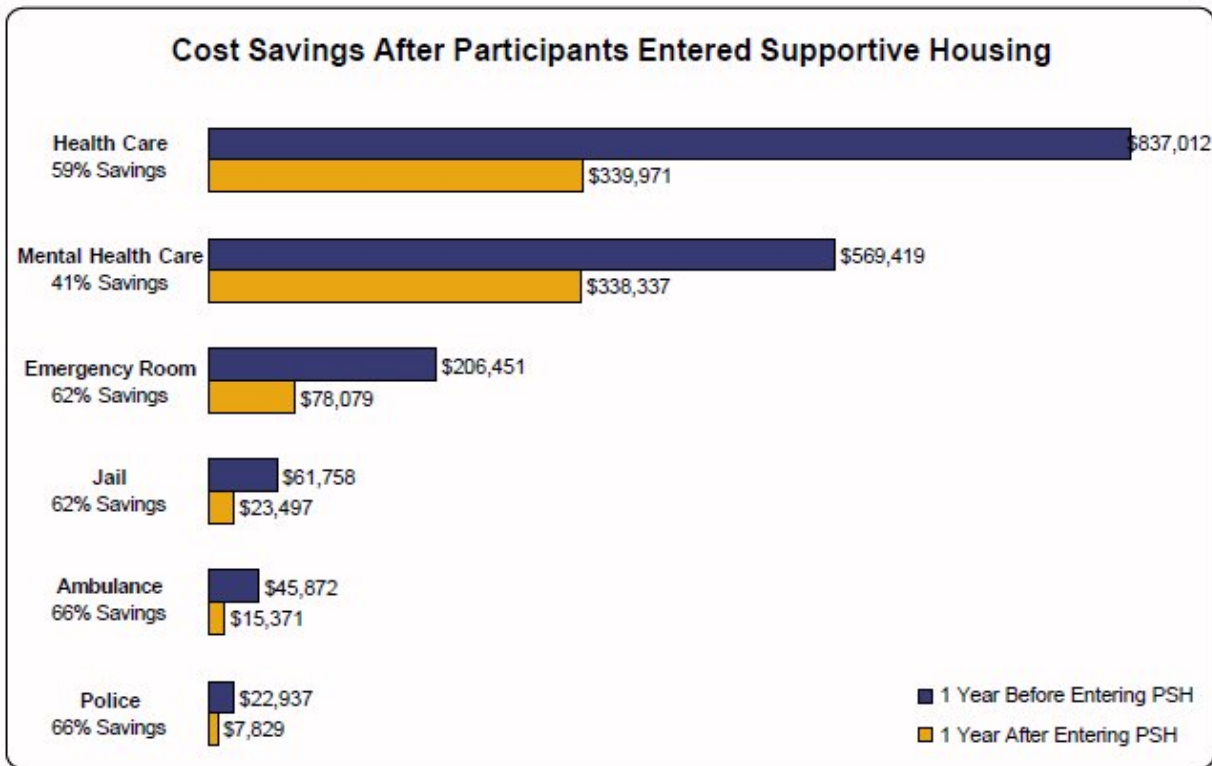
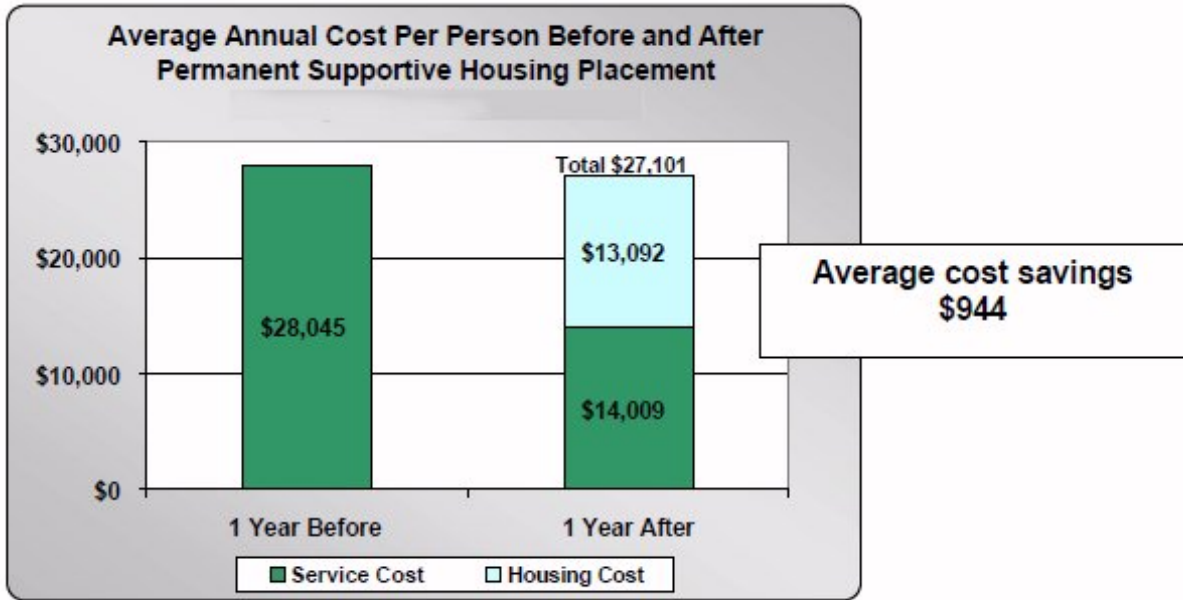
The chronically homeless must be homeless more than one year OR more than three times in three years AND have a disability. Research shows that the longer a person is homeless, the more detached from society they become. Multiple issues prevent them from acquiring stability. Safe housing is a critical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

- 5% percent of the homeless that were counted during the 2009 Point-In-Time count were considered chronic representing a 12% decline from the 2008 count.

cost of homelessness

For mayors, city councils, and even homeless providers it often seems that placing homeless people in shelters, while not the most desirable course, is at least the most inexpensive way of meeting basic needs. This is deceptive. The cost of homelessness can be quite high, particularly for those with chronic illnesses. Because they have no regular place to stay, people who are homeless use a variety of public systems in an inefficient and costly way. Preventing a homeless episode or ensuring a speedy transition into stable permanent housing can result in a significant cost savings.

Homelessness causes illnesses and makes existing mental and physical illnesses worse, leading to expensive treatment and medical services. Perma-



Permanent supportive housing improves physical and mental health, which reduces the need for these services, particularly expensive inpatient mental health care and hospitalization. Permanent supportive housing helps tenants increase their incomes, work more, get arrested less, make more progress toward recovery, and become more active and productive members of their communities.

A recent study in Boone, NC found that unsheltered homeless individuals cost the community (in jail and medical costs) approximately \$31,491.20, whereas the two sheltered groups each accrued

almost 1/3 of that cost, with the short-term residents having a total cost of \$12, 661.52 and the long-term residents having a total cost of \$10,355.76. Breaking down the data, the unsheltered group had the highest medical costs (\$15,919) and associated jail costs (\$15,572.20) with nearly 245 days spent in jail between the 12 individuals. Furthermore, the unsheltered group had a marginally significant higher number of days spent in jail (245, compared to 17 and 46 respectively).

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 2009 Point-In-Time count. 70% of the homeless were housed in emergency, transitional or seasonal shelters. It should also be noted that the large number of sheltered homeless persons was due almost exclusively to the efforts of local churches operating under temporary zoning variances.

migration concerns

There is understandable concern by some that setting up services for homeless people will cause homeless people from around the country to migrate to Morganton and Burke County. Studies have shown that homeless people do not migrate for services. To the extent they do move to new areas, it is because they are searching for work, have family in the area, or other reasons not related to services. The demographics we have observed confirm studies that have found that 75% of homeless people live in the city in which they became homeless.⁴ The 2009 count reveals that only 3% of the homeless considered themselves transient. Fully 97% identified themselves as permanent residents of Burke County.

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:

- 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 num-

bers 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 167 people are homeless in Burke County at this (January 29, 2009) 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.

- 30% of homeless people have not secured transitional housing in the county.
- 5% of homeless people in Burke County avoid shelters and survive on the streets and fit the HUD definition of chronically homeless.
- 41% of homeless people in Burke County are families and 14% of those have children in their care.
- 24 % of homeless people in Burke County are children.

Recommendations

The Burke County Continuum of Care for the Homeless makes the following recommendations based on the 2009 HUD Point-in-Time count.

- Develop and coordinate resources for homeless prevention
- □ Secure federal funding to establish or expand services to bridge the gaps in services indicated above.
- Work cooperatively with local government entities to target and develop shelter and services for the at risk groups identified above.
- Work with local governments, agencies and businesses to develop rapid re-housing opportunities for the homeless.
- Work closely with city and county leaders to implement accessible and affordable supportive housing through the NCHFA Supportive Housing Development Program.
- Request a representative from local governments to work with the Continuum of Care to develop a strategic plan to end homelessness as provided in the North Carolina Consolidated Plan 2006-2010.

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.

Sources Cited In This Report

¹2008 HUD Point-In-Time Count, Burke County Continuum of Care Homeless Committee, Final Report.

²Homeless Count Up 50%, *News Herald*, Morganton, NC, March 28, 2008.

³20 Beds Don't Meet the Needs of Burke Homeless, *News Herald*, Morganton, NC, January 20, 2007.

⁴U.S. Counsel of Mayors. "A Status Report on Hunger and Homelessness in America's Cities: a 27-city survey", December 2001.

⁵ "Fair Market Rent" is generally the 40% percentile rent for the area. For a detailed definition see www.huduser.org/datasets/fmr/fmrover.doc.

⁶ "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).

⁷Economic Development Intelligence System Burke County 2nd Quarter Report 2008

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.