

A HOME FOR EVERYONE

Whatcom County Coalition to End Homelessness 2020 Annual Report

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

Part B: Youth Homeless Count

Part C: Public School Students and their Families

July 2020

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

Introduction

On January 23rd, 2020, volunteers and homeless housing providers counted 707 people in Whatcom County who were experiencing homelessness during the annual Point in Time (PIT) Count. In addition to those who were counted, hundreds more are known to be at risk of losing their homes and becoming homeless in Whatcom County. The leading causes of homeless that respondents identified included lack of economic opportunity, family break up, untreated mental illness, substance use disorder, domestic violence, and inadequate re-entry services for people released from institutional settings, including psychiatric hospitalization, treatment, and incarceration. The combination of high rent and low unit vacancy rates have led many at-risk households of all sizes to share housing units with additional individuals or families (“doubling up”), although these arrangements are not included in the 707 identified individuals that were counted on January 23.

This annual report provides historical and current data from the PIT Count, along with other relevant data, that helps guide local efforts to reduce and end homelessness, informs our community about the local face of homelessness, and provides a year by year comparison to help identify emerging trends.

The 2020 Homeless Count

The 2020 PIT Count was made possible by the 52 volunteers who participated in Whatcom County, which was a modest increase from the previous year. The weather caused challenges for volunteers, especially those covering locations outdoors on wet days or in East County, where the mobile food pantry was closed. However, youth were more accessible, thanks to the new day-use center program offered by Northwest Youth Services. Increased coordination with Lighthouse Mission Ministries resulted in a record high count of surveys returned from the county’s largest shelter provider. The Homeless Outreach Team repeated the support of previous years by surveying unsheltered households and those in camps, but with fewer team members than in 2019, the number of returned surveys decreased. As is common from year to year, a few of the identified counting locations were not available on the day of the count. The three survey locations most impacted in 2020 were the Syringe Services Program event, the East Whatcom mobile food pantry (which was not in operation due to harsh weather, and the Lummi Women’s Shelter, whose surveys were not returned in time to be included. Despite these challenges, the combined efforts of so many volunteers and agencies are believed to have provided coverage at least on par with previous years, and new strategies help improve our reach year after year. However, it is acknowledged that Point in Time Counts consistently 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).
- Participation in the PIT count is voluntary and a small number of households decline to complete the survey. Our volunteers noted some people declined to participate at several locations, as has been the case in previous years.

How many are homeless?

This year we counted:

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

- 218 persons reported being unsheltered

Who are the people experiencing homelessness?

The 2020 homeless population is as diverse as the larger community population. They have complex barriers and incredible resiliency: They are old and young; they span a range of gender identifications, and may be unaccompanied individuals or members of families with or without children. Some reside in shelters, while others are, literally, without a roof over their heads. Some have been homeless for most of their lives, while others have recently lost housing for the first time. Of those counted this year:

- 84% of homeless households included only one person
- There were 64 families with children that included 192 persons; the median¹ family size was 3 persons
- 8% of homeless persons identify as Native American, a striking comparison to local census data that reports Whatcom County's Native American comprises only 2.7% of Whatcom County residents

In terms of age and identified gender:

- Ages ranged from less than one year old to 86 years old
- Median age of all homeless persons was 40 years
- Median age of unaccompanied homeless persons was 46 years
- 42% of all homeless persons self-identified as female

Homeless Minors and Young Adults

"Every night, thousands of homeless youth in Washington go to sleep without safety, stability, and support of a family or home" (Washington State Department of Commerce). Homelessness among youth may result from family problems, economic problems, and residential instability. Some youth become homeless together with their families; others leave home after years of physical, emotional, and/or sexual abuse, strained relationships, neglect, addiction of a family member, or their own substance use disorder. Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or queer (LGBTBQ) youth experience significantly higher rates of homelessness than their non-LGBTBQ peers. The following statistics describe youth we encountered in 2020 who are literally homeless².

- 103 persons under 18 years old were counted, or 15% of all homeless persons
- 10% of all homeless persons were 9 years old or less
- 33 persons counted were 16 to 21 years old
- 58 persons were 15 to 24 years old
- 1 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). During this special youth count, conducted at the same time as the larger survey, we encountered:

- 41 youth households including 52 persons
- 1 unaccompanied minor (staying in emergency shelter)

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.

² Literally homeless means people who are staying unsheltered, in emergency shelter, or in homeless transitional housing. It does not include couch surfing or other informal living arrangements in private residences.

- 5 young adult families with children consisting of 5 young adults and 6 children
- 27% of young adult households were unsheltered
- 29% of youth had a self-reported mental health disability
- 38% of youth identify as LGTBQ

Community Re-Entry from Institutions

Survey respondents were asked if they had been discharged from an institution within the last six months. Seventy-two (13%) household respondents said they had been released from jail or prison, inpatient substance use disorder treatment, and/or mental health treatment in the last six months.

- 10% of household respondents had been released from jail or prison (n=55)
- 3% had been released from inpatient substance use disorder treatment (n=16)
- 2% had been released from a psychiatric hospital (n=9)

Shelter

Survey respondents told us where their households had slept the previous night:

- 13% in transitional housing (n=71)
- 55% in emergency shelter³ (n=308)
- 20% out of doors (n=112)
- 9% in a vehicle (n=49)
- 2% in a RV/boat lacking basic amenities (n=13)
- <1% in an abandoned building (n=2)

Chronic Homelessness

Using HUD's definition, **126 unaccompanied persons** indicated that they were experiencing chronic homelessness, a nearly 25% decrease from the 2019 PIT Count. Our Homeless Outreach Team was again invaluable in obtaining this information; however, many survey respondents did not supply enough information to determine whether or not they met all of the HUD chronic homelessness characteristics, and some volunteers reported challenges with the question. HUD defines chronic homelessness as the condition of an unaccompanied individual who has been homeless either for 12 months or more OR has had four or more episodes of homelessness in the last three years AND those episodes must total 12 months, 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 use disorder, permanent physical or developmental disability). Typically, the longer people live on the streets, the worse their health becomes over time, and this leads to chronic homelessness.

The number (and percent) of all 555 counted households with any of the HUD characteristics of chronic homelessness include:

- 475 (86%) unaccompanied, single individuals
- 199 (36%) had been homeless for 12 months or more
- 157 (28%) have had four or more episodes of homelessness in the last three years AND those episodes total at least 12 months
- 285 (51%) households include a person with a disabling condition
- 484 (87%) slept in a place not meant for human habitation or in emergency shelter

³ Emergency shelter includes 12 households who stayed in a motel using an emergency assistance voucher.

Homeless Housing System

While it is beyond the scope of a Point in Time Count Report to comprehensively cover the entire coordinated homeless housing system in Whatcom County, the following are important statistics for families who received a housing intervention in 2019 and who likely would otherwise have become (or remain) homeless.

- 1,246 households received housing assistance through the Whatcom County Coordinated Entry System
- 250 households received assistance to prevent an eviction
- 362 households were sheltered with emergency assistance (e.g. family receiving a motel voucher), frequently as a bridge to a more permanent housing situation.
 - This does not include programs of the Lighthouse Mission or the Lummi Nation's emergency shelters
- In total, nearly 3,000 individuals were assisted in 2019 with shelter and/or housing

Without the efforts of partner agencies and the resources from our local, state, and federal funders, these households may also have been homeless at the time of the survey. Partner agencies include: Bellingham Housing Authority, Catholic Community Services, DVSAS, Interfaith Coalition, Lake Whatcom Residential and Treatment Center, Lighthouse Mission Ministries, Lydia Place, Mercy Housing, Northwest Youth Services, Opportunity Council, Pioneer Human Services, Sun Community Services, and the YWCA.

Key Findings

Our community benefited from new resources since the 2019 PIT Count: Northwest Youth Services opened the Ground Floor, a day-use center for at-risk, runaway and homeless youth in partnership with First Congregational Church of Bellingham. Northwest Youth Services also used this space for temporary winter shelter for youth, while Opportunity Council operated a temporary winter shelter for single women in partnership with the City of Bellingham. HomesNOW! Not Later created Unity Village, a tiny home community for homeless adults. Additionally, new tenant protections were passed by the state legislature: pay or vacate notices extended to 14 days, notice of rental increases extended to 60 days, and notice to vacate in the event of major rehabilitation, demolition, or change of building use was extended to 120 days.

Compared to the baseline year of 2008 when our community began implementing the 10 Year Plan to End Homelessness, the number of people counted in 2020 that were literally homeless⁴ decreased by 34%. The number of families with children declined this year, from 72 in 2019 to 64 in 2020. Also compared to our baseline year, there has been a 37% reduction in the number of homeless families with children.

However, this year's data shows negative trends as well. The proportion of individuals 55 or older has increased from last year, now accounting for 21% of the total homeless count and 29% of the unaccompanied individuals. This highlights the disparate impact of rising rents on seniors in our community. Seniors are not the only population facing particularly intense pressure. Although Native Americans represent slightly less than 3% of the total population of Whatcom County, they comprise 8% of the persons counted as homeless.

More than 2,221 individuals were re-housed or received assistance to prevent them from becoming homeless in 2019. The partners of Coordinated Entry, together with Whatcom County and the City of Bellingham, help an amazing number of people. It is hard to imagine the streets of Whatcom County filled with 2,200 more people experiencing homelessness, but without the investments we have made thus far, that would be a likely reality. Assisting an additional 700 individuals into permanent housing is an attainable goal if the necessary resources are made available. The need for deeper investments in affordable housing is increasing, however. In fact, a minimum wage worker would have to work 52 hours

⁴ Literally homeless means people who are staying unsheltered, in emergency shelter, or in homeless transitional housing

per week to afford a one bedroom apartment at Fair Market Rent ⁵(\$811 per month) in Whatcom County. (National Low Income Housing Coalition, Out of Reach 2019) Units in this price range are increasingly difficult to find.

This is the eighth year we can report the proportion of people we encountered who were also encountered in previous homeless counts. Altogether, 14% of the homeless households we encountered in 2020 were also encountered in 2019; 12% were also encountered in 2018, 7% were also encountered in 2017, 5% were also encountered in 2016; 4% were also encountered in 2015; 2% were also encountered in 2014, 2% were also encountered in 2013 and 1% were also encountered in 2012. In other words, 7% of homeless households encountered in 2017 have been continuously homeless for at least three years, OR, they have been housed and become homeless again during that time interval (see graph on page 28).

⁵ The Fair Market Rent is HUD's best estimate of what a household seeking a modest rental home in a short amount of time can expect to pay for rent and utilities in the current market.

Acknowledgments

Counting people who are experiencing homelessness for the annual Point-in-Time Count is not an easy task. Successful PIT Counts in Whatcom County are made possible because of the commitment from the service organizations such as Lighthouse Mission Ministries and Summer Starr, Opportunity Council's Volunteer and Community Outreach Coordinator, community volunteers, and members of the Whatcom County Coalition to End Homelessness.

This year was no exception; a great number of individuals and organizations assisted with the 2020 PIT count.

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

Finally, we would like to extend a special thank you to the individuals and families who responded to this year's PIT Count survey. We understand that we are asking you some difficult questions and 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. Your assistance can help us perform better at our work in ending homelessness in Whatcom County.

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

Introduction

The Point-in-Time Surveys revealed that at least 707 people in Whatcom County were homeless overnight on January 22, 2020. Throughout the year, hundreds more face the prospect of losing their homes due to economic hardship, domestic violence and sexual assault, family break up, loss of employment, 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, such as negative stigma around mental illness and poverty. Wage growth has been greatly outpaced by rising housing costs. The slow pace of dedicated affordable housing development and the low rate of rental vacancies make it increasingly difficult for people who become homeless to return to stable, permanent housing.

Furthermore, given the current economic and health crisis due to COVID-19 and related rent moratoriums, the future housing landscape is uncertain. New resources have been provided to address the emergency, but it is too soon to understand the full impact of these crises on homelessness or on the homeless housing system.

Report format. This marks the twelfth year of our community's efforts to implement its formal response outlined in the original 10-Year Plan to End Homelessness. The plan has been updated as of 2019. This year we are using this reporting opportunity for three 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 homeless⁶. Part A of this report is consistent and comparable with past years' methods to measure people who are literally homeless at a single point in time (see Part C below for cumulative school data).

Part B: Youth Homeless Count describes the results of our regular Point-In-Time count efforts to locate youth and young adults who are either literally homeless or who have unstable housing and are at risk of becoming literally homeless.

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, at any time over the course of a complete school year. The data comes from Washington State's Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI). Doubled up students and families in addition to literally homeless families are included in this data.

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 Coalition to End Homelessness, Whatcom County Health Department, Whatcom Homeless Service Center, and Opportunity Council. In 2020 more than 30 agencies participated in the count.

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 and our City and County governments 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.

⁶ Literally homeless means people who are staying unsheltered, in emergency shelter, or in homeless transitional housing

Limitations

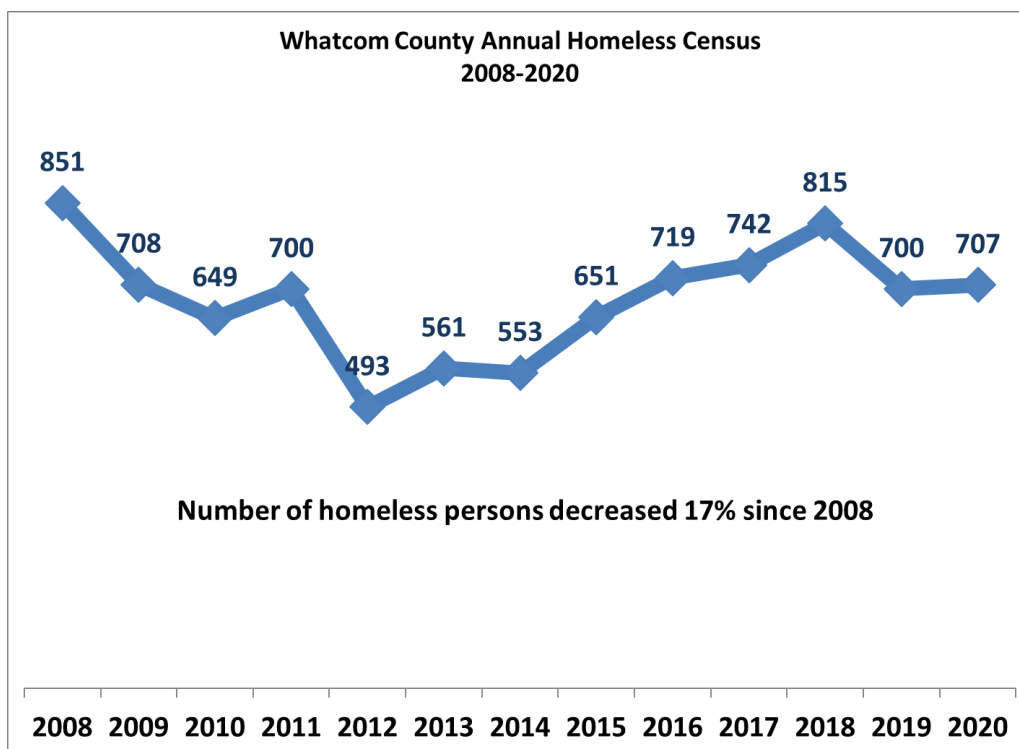
National research indicates that Point-in-Time Counts generally underestimate the number of those who are homeless because:

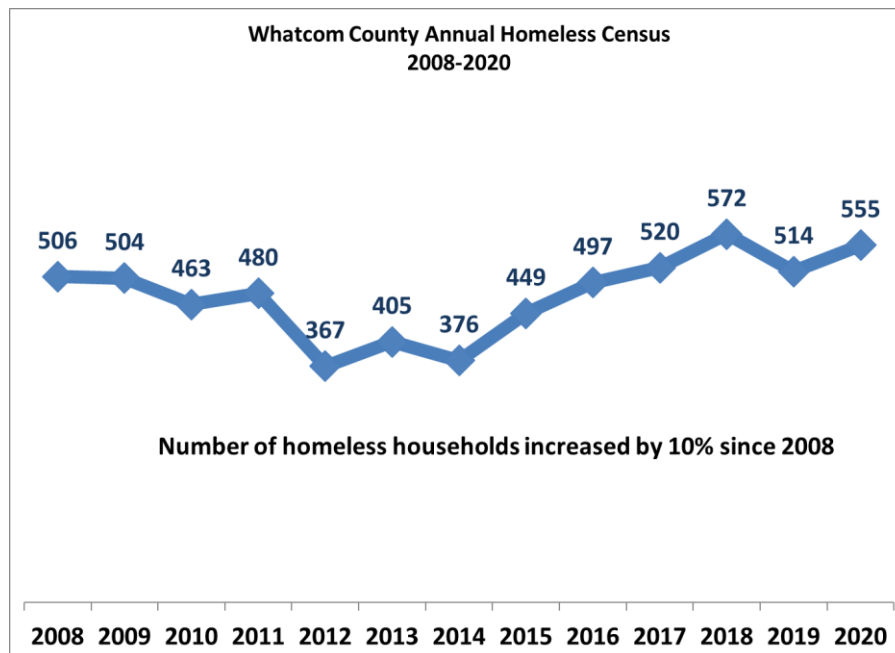
- Participation is voluntary, and some choose not to be counted. This is especially true of immigrants, even those with legal status, whose concerns of reprisal may dissuade them from participating.
- A point-in-time is just a “snapshot” and does not capture all those who are cycling in and out of homelessness over the year. Furthermore, “snapshots” will miss seasonal fluctuations that 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, sheds, abandoned cars).

Number of Homeless Individuals and Families in Whatcom County

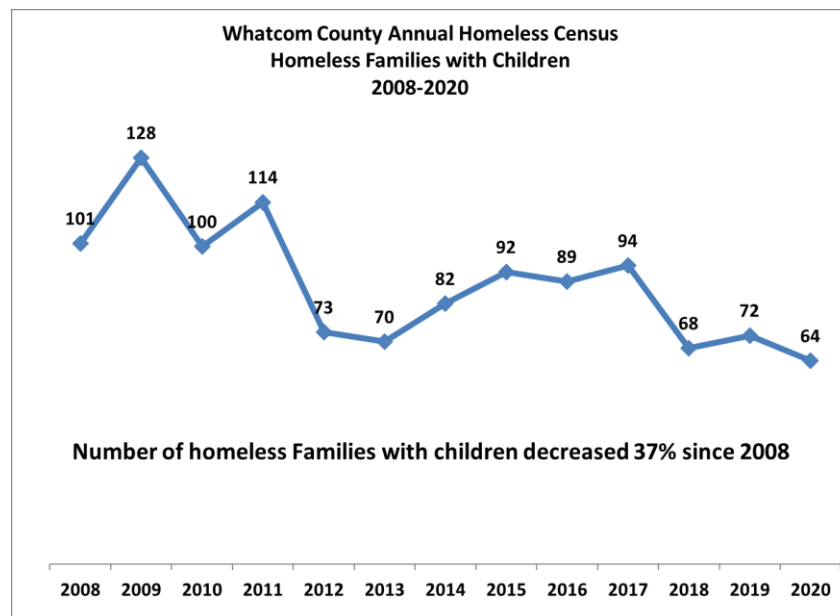
At a single point in time in late January 2020, a total of **707 persons** were homeless in Whatcom County. They were members of **555 households**. For the purpose of this homeless count, households were divided into two categories: *sheltered* and *unsheltered* individuals and families. Sheltered homeless 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 17% decrease in the number of homeless persons since 2008 and a 10% increase in homeless households. The year-over-year change between 2019 and 2020 was a 1% increase in homeless persons counted (from 700 homeless persons in 2019 to 707 in 2020). The year-over-year change in number of homeless households increased by 8% between 2019-2020 (514 in 2019 to 555 in 2020).





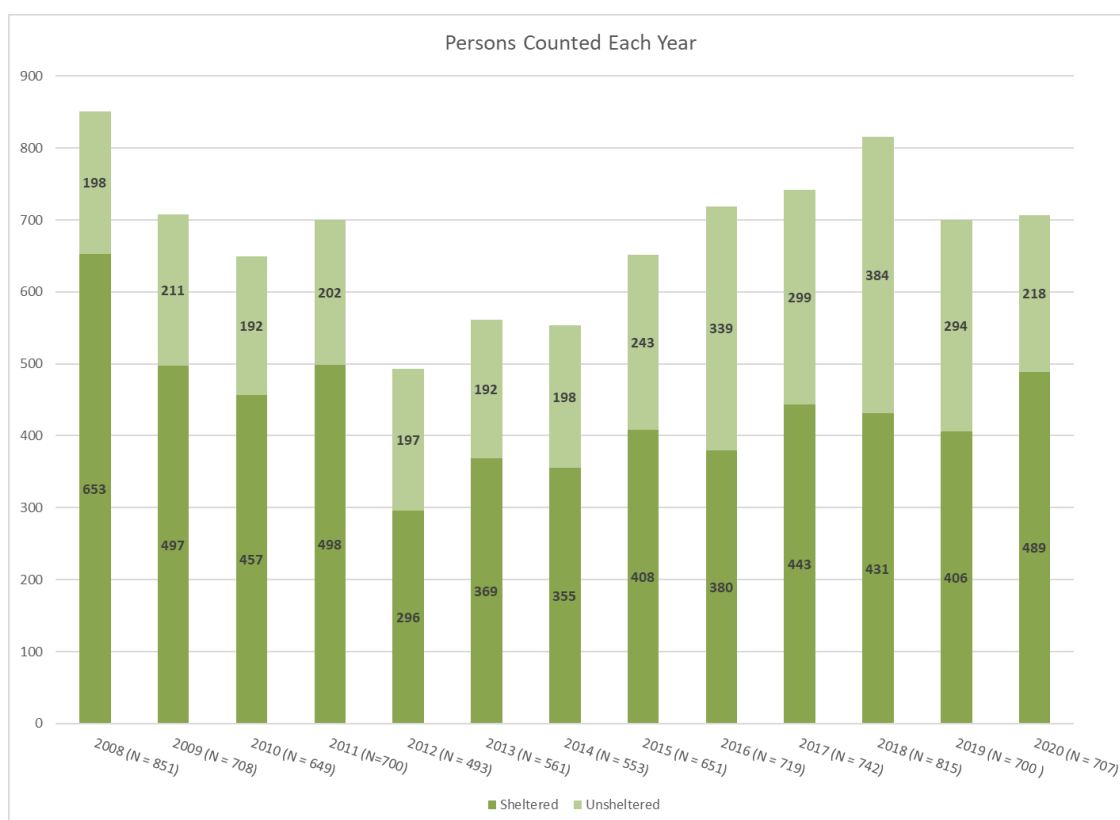
Overall, there has been a 38% decrease in the number of homeless families with children since 2008. From 2019 to 2020, the number of homeless families decreased from 72 to 64, a decrease of 11%. As stated in this report, this number is based on self-report, and custody status of children is not verified. For comparison, there were approximately 51 families in the Coordinated Entry system waiting for housing and two more at-risk families engaged in diversion case management at the Opportunity Council.



Characteristics of Homeless Persons and Families

Un-sheltered and Sheltered Homeless Persons and Families

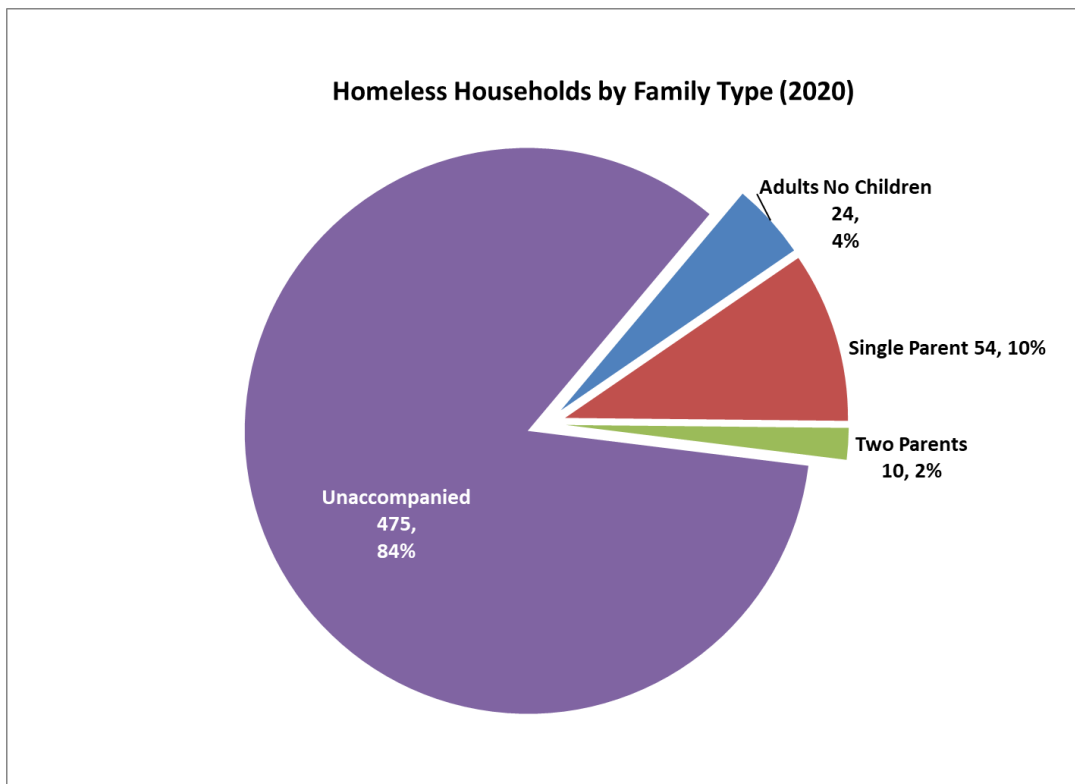
A key measure in the PIT count is the number of unsheltered individuals. Of the 707 persons counted this year, 218 were unsheltered, which includes those in camps, cars, and places not meant for human habitation. The table below shows this breakdown since Whatcom PIT counts began in 2008. In 2020 there was a significant reduction from 2019 in the number of people who were unsheltered while the number of sheltered individuals increased. Two vacancies on the Homeless Outreach Team may account for some of the decrease in unsheltered individuals, while the increased coordination with Lighthouse Mission, the additional winter weather shelters for women and youth, and the new Unity Village Tiny Home complex may account for the increase in sheltered individuals. In addition, several housing programs participating in the Coordinated Entry System were able to serve more households than in the past, and increased prioritization of unsheltered households for program referrals. Lastly, when comparing this trend over time, it is important to note that the Department of Commerce issued new definitions in 2019 for RVs and mobile homes without water and electricity to be considered sheltered in contrast with 2018 where they would have been unsheltered.



Household Size and Family Status

Of the 555 homeless households counted, 567 (84%) were unaccompanied persons. There were 24 (4%) family households with no children. A total of 64 (12%) families with children were counted, most of who (54) were single-parent families; 10 (2%) families had both parents present. One unaccompanied minor was encountered this year. This year saw a 13% decrease in households with children and a 13% increase in households without children.

Household Type	Number of Households	Percent of Households
Adults No Children	24	4%
Single Parent	54	10%
Two Parents	10	2%
Unaccompanied	467	84%
Total	555	100%

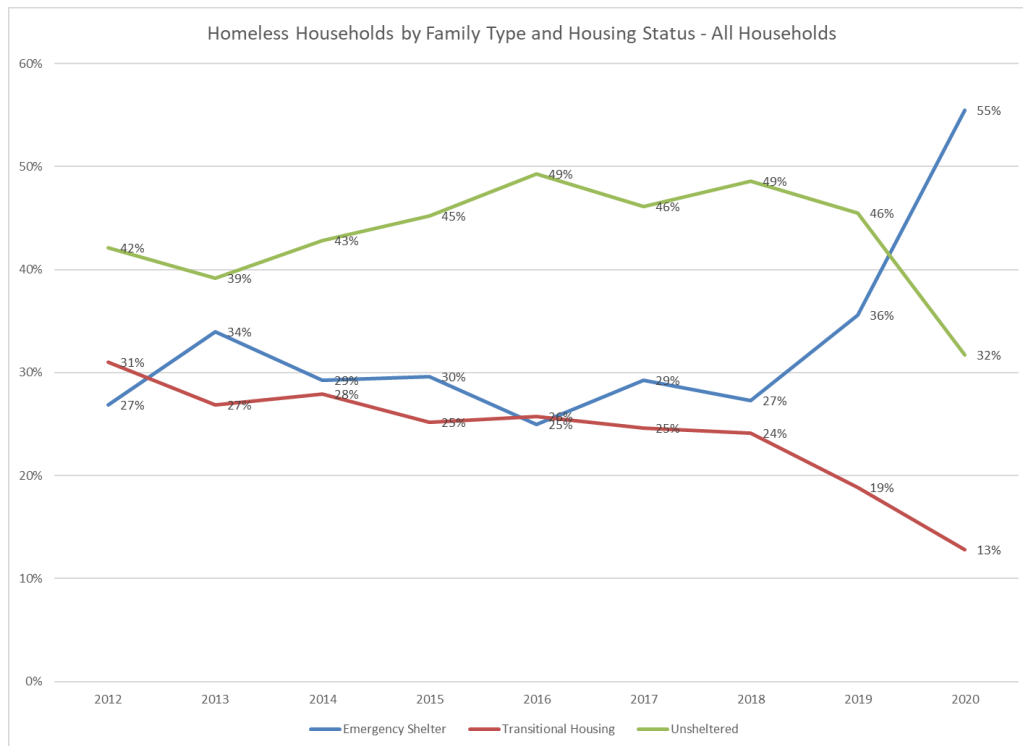


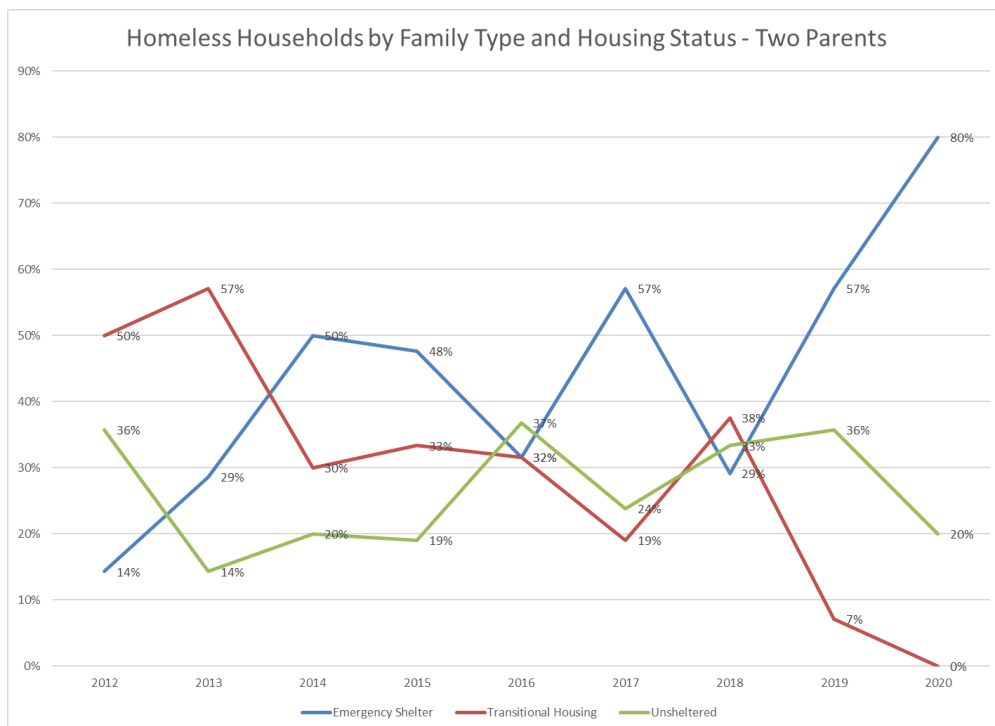
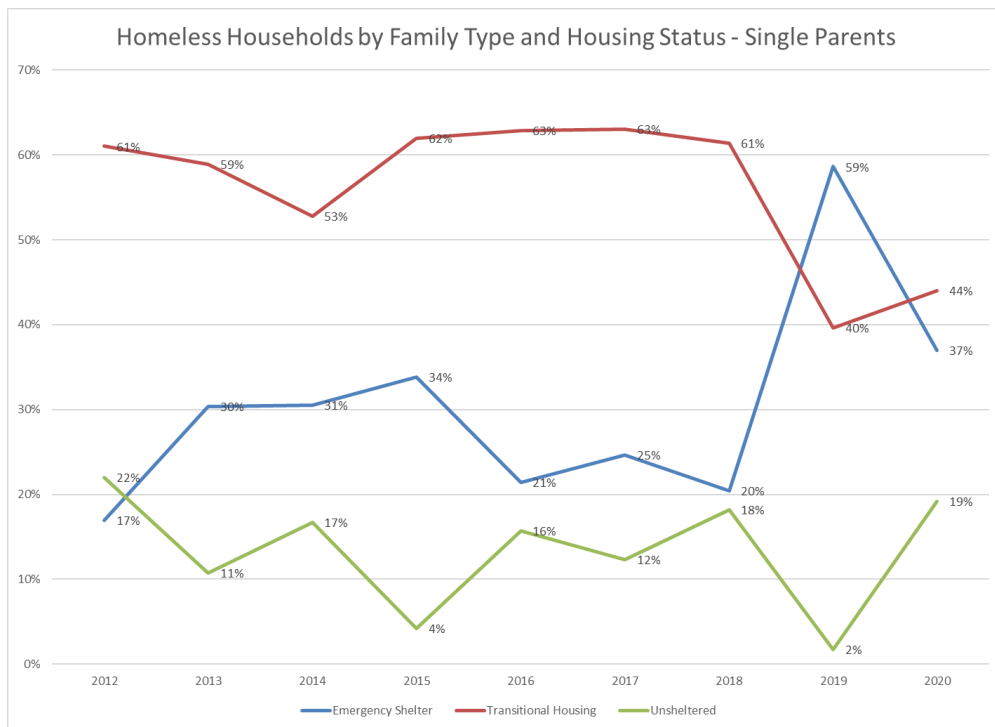
Compared to 2019, fewer households without children were unsheltered in 2020.

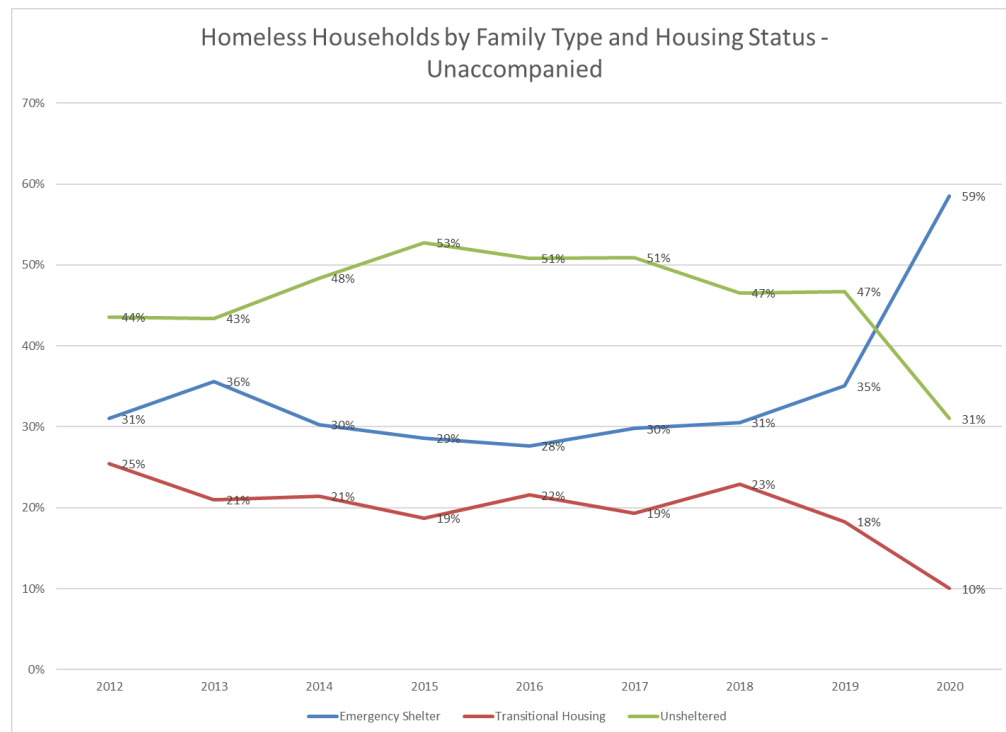
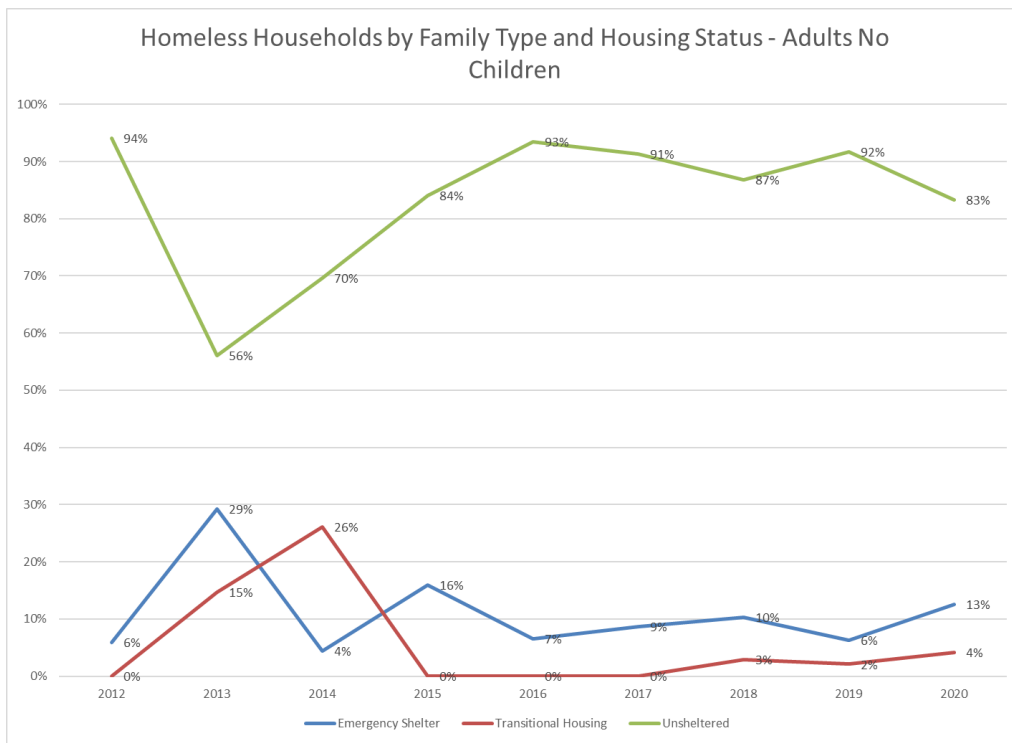
For example, 31% of unaccompanied adult households were unsheltered, which is 16% lower than 2019.

For families with children, the proportion of unsheltered was slightly lower this year compared to last year for two parent households (0% of two parent households compared to 36% in 2019), but was up for single parent households compared to last year (19% in 2020 were unsheltered and 2% of single parent households were unsheltered in 2019).

The charts following show this breakdown by family type in this year as well as previous years.



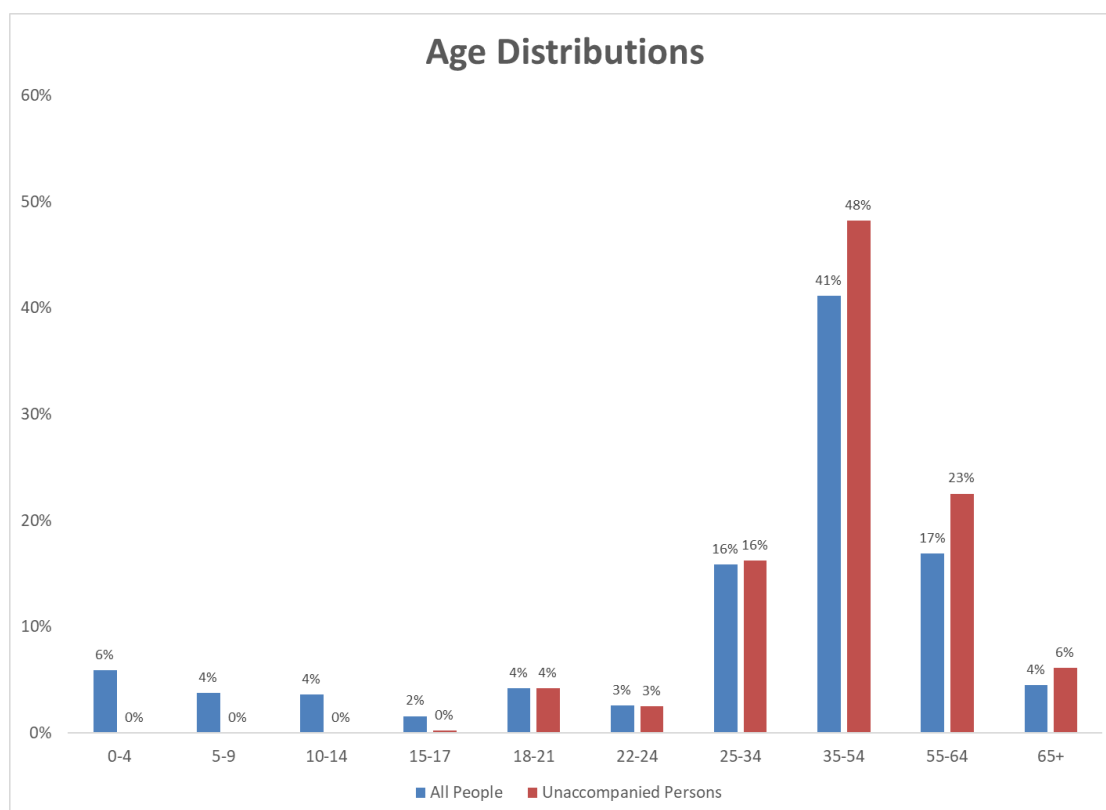




Age and Gender

Homeless persons were almost evenly divided between persons who identified as males (47%) and identified as females (42%), although it should be noted that 10% of surveys were missing gender data, and less than 1% of respondents identified as gender nonconforming. More surveys missing gender data were collected than in past years. Ages ranged from less than one year old to 86 years old. The median age of all homeless persons was 40 years. 10% of all homeless persons this year were children under 10 years old, and 15% were under 18 years old.

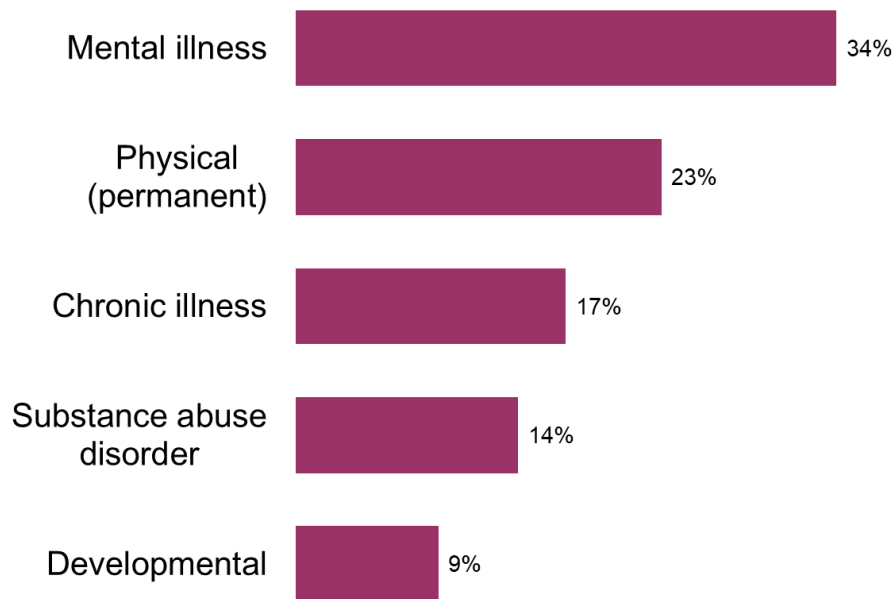
The median age of unaccompanied homeless persons was 46 years. One unaccompanied minor was encountered during this year's Count. Half (48%) of unaccompanied homeless persons were in the 35-54 years age range. Households aged 55-64 increased over 2019, with 23% unaccompanied households in this age range counted compared to 20% unaccompanied households in the same age range in 2019.



Disabling Conditions

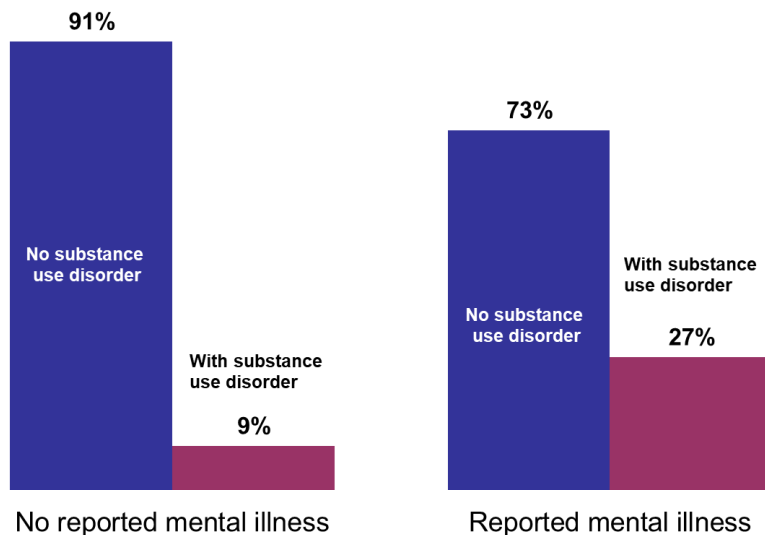
Homeless count survey respondents were asked to list which of five disabilities applied to each member of their household. The most prevalent disabling conditions were mental illness (34%), permanent physical disabilities (23%), chronic illness (17%), substance use disorders (14%), and developmental disability (9%). 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 (2020)



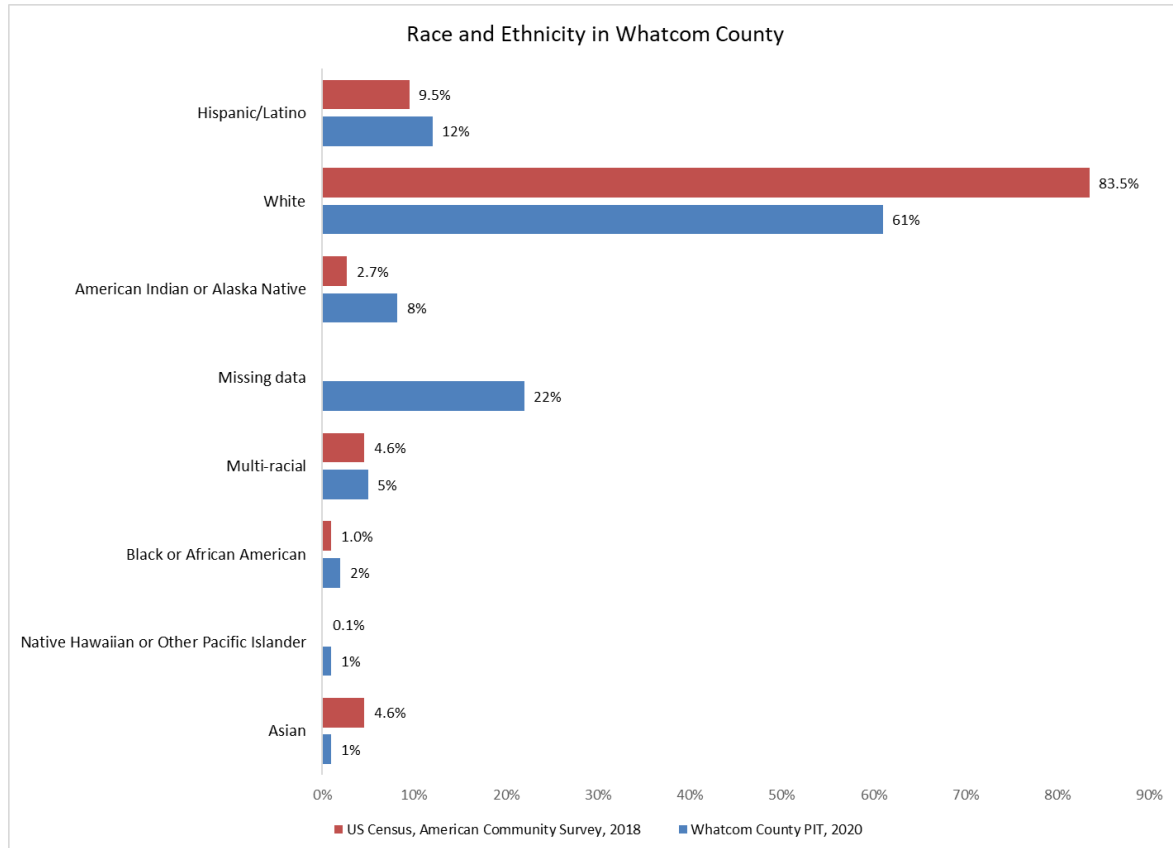
Additional analysis shows that a substantial number of homeless persons face the challenges of co-occurring disorders. About 1 in 3 (27%) persons who reported having a mental illness also reported having a substance use disorder. Research estimates from the Journal of the American Medical Association put the number closer to 50%, underscoring respondent's reluctance to disclose substance use disorders.

Homeless persons with reported mental illness are highly likely to have a co-occurring substance use disorder (2020)



Race and Ethnicity

Homeless count survey respondents were asked to list which race or races they identified with and the results are shown on the below graph. Persons of color experience rates of homelessness in greater numbers than their white neighbors. This is consistent with American Community Survey (census data) which shows households of color in higher rates of poverty than white-identified households. American Indian/Alaska Natives comprise 2.7% of the population of Whatcom County but are 8% of the counted homeless population. In addition, 22% of respondents did not divulge race.

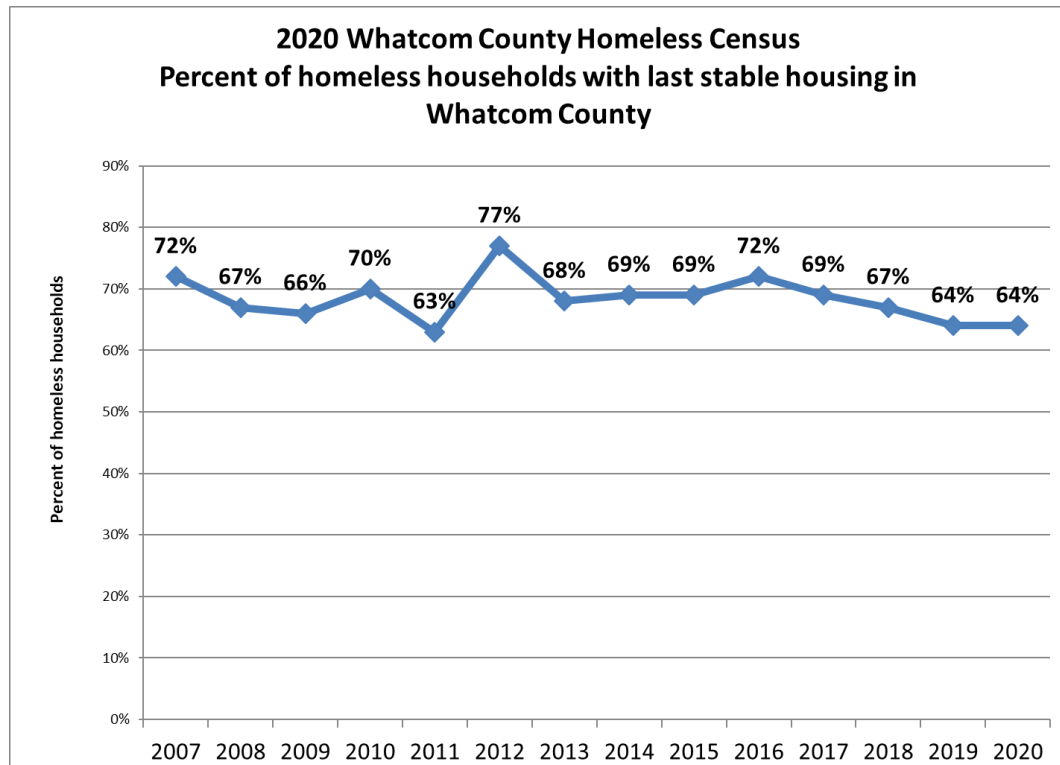


Characteristics of Homelessness in Whatcom County

Geographic Distribution: Location of Previous Residence

About two-thirds (64%) of homeless households had their last stable housing in Whatcom County. That statistic has been fairly stable despite new investments toward ending homelessness. This data refutes a common misperception that new services attract new people from elsewhere.

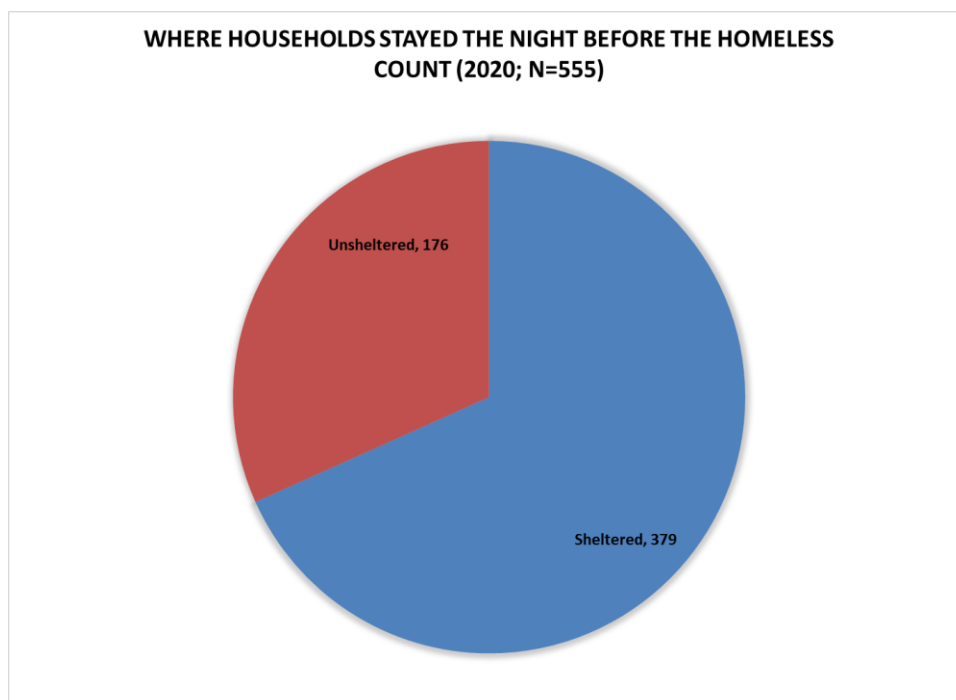
Of these households, nearly three quarters (73%) reported that their last stable housing in Whatcom County was located in Bellingham. The next most frequent locations were Ferndale, Blaine, Maple Falls, and Lynden.



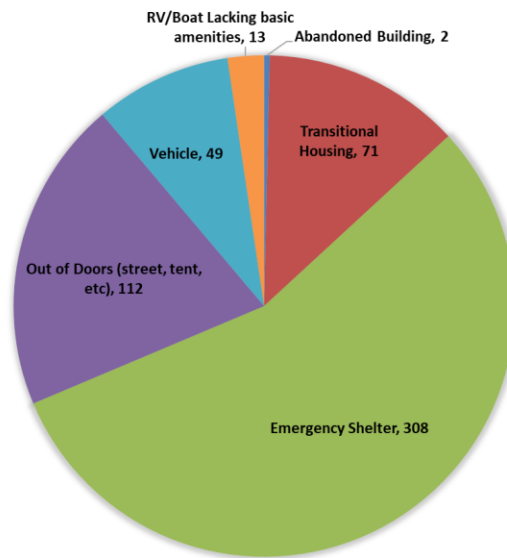
Sources of Shelter

Compared to 2008, this year's count of unsheltered households was up 24%. Year-over-year compared to 2019, however, the number of unsheltered households decreased by 25%.

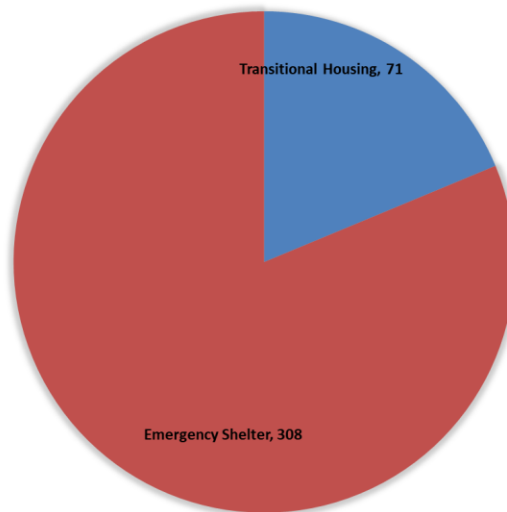
In 2020, 68% of all homeless households were sheltered. Of that 68%, over three fourths (81%) were in emergency shelter, which includes motels if they were receiving a "voucher" or financial assistance to stay there, and the others were in transitional housing (19%). Of the 32% of homeless households who were unsheltered, most (64%) were staying outdoors, 28% were living in their vehicles, and the remaining 8% were in a RV or boat lacking access amenities such as water or power or an abandoned building.



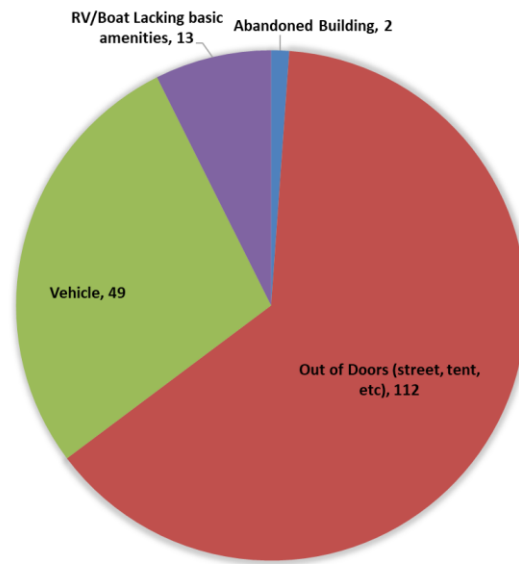
**WHERE HOUSEHOLDS STAYED THE NIGHT BEFORE THE HOMELESS COUNT (2020;
N=555)**



**WHERE SHELTERED HOUSEHOLDS STAYED THE NIGHT BEFORE THE HOMELESS
COUNT (2020; N=477)**

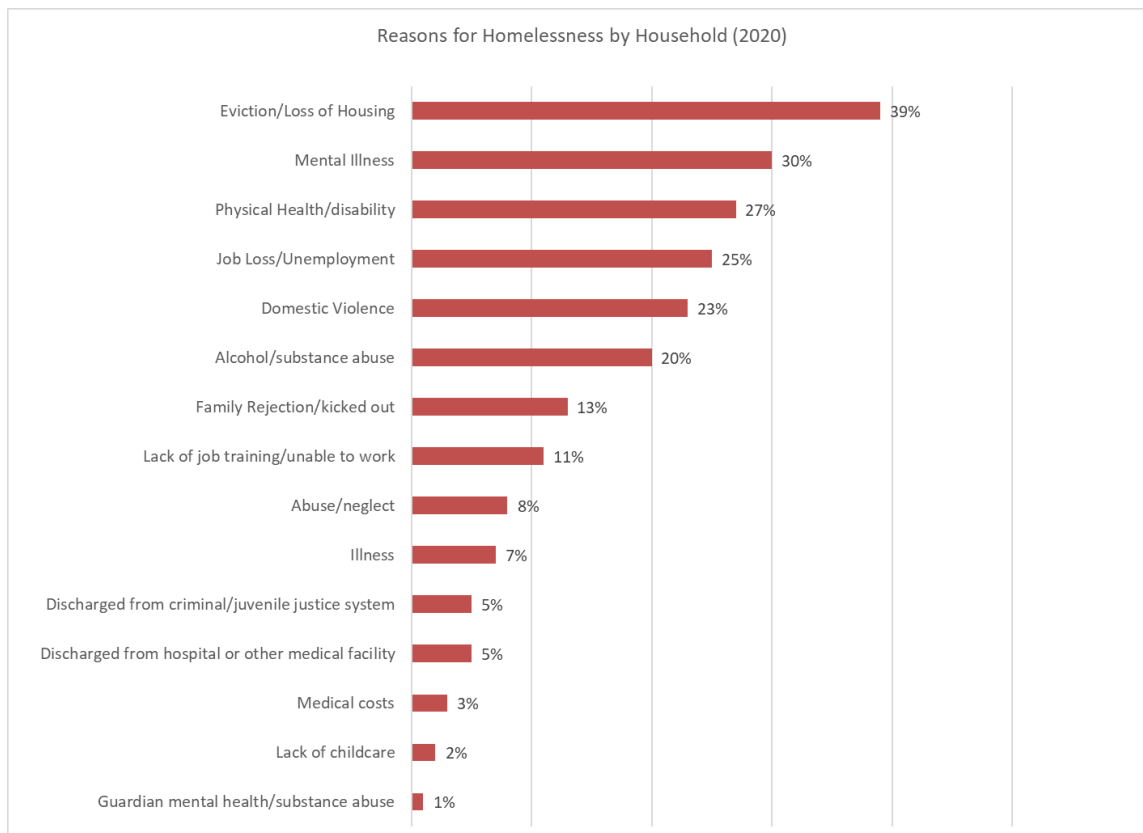


**WHERE UNSHELTERED HOUSEHOLDS STAYED THE NIGHT BEFORE THE
HOMELESS COUNT (2020; N=216)**



Reasons for Homelessness

Homelessness results from a complex set of circumstances that require people to choose between food, shelter and other needs. In fact, 19% of respondents to this year's count reported three or more reasons for their homelessness. The top factors this year were eviction or loss of housing (39%), mental illness (30%), physical health or disability (27%), job loss/unemployment (25%), domestic violence (23%), and alcohol or drug use (22%). Eviction/loss of housing remains the leading cause of homelessness.

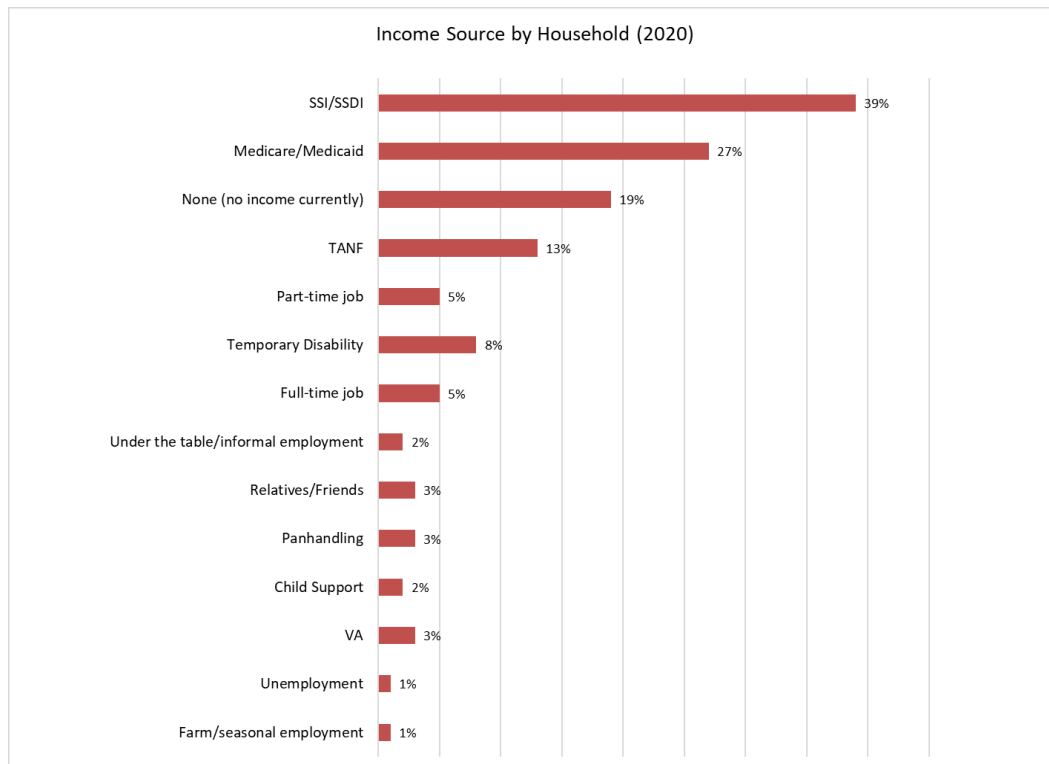


“Losing your home and possessions and often your job; being stamped with an eviction record and denied government housing assistance; relocating to degrading housing in poor and dangerous neighborhoods; and suffering from increased material hardship, homelessness, depression and illness – this is eviction’s fallout. Eviction does not simply drop poor families in to a dark valley, a trying yet relatively brief detour on life’s journey. It fundamentally redirects their way, casting them onto a different, and much more difficult, path. Eviction is a cause, not just a condition, of poverty.”⁷

⁷ Desmond, M. (2016), *Evicted: Poverty and Profit in the American City*. Crown Publishers.

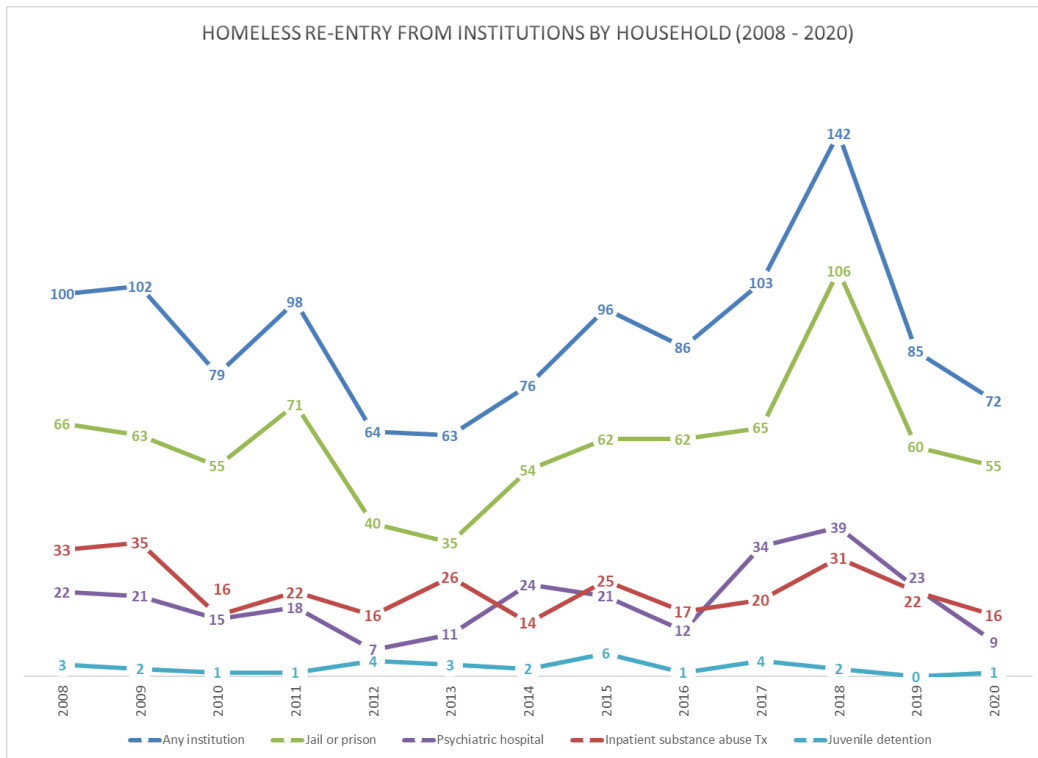
Sources of Income and Other Benefits

Almost one in five (19%) of homeless households reported having no income whatsoever. The most common income sources reported by homeless households in 2020 were Supplemental Security Income / Social Security Disability Income (SSI/SSDI) and Medicare/Medicaid. SSI benefits for 2020 are \$783 per month. Only 13% of households reported income from any type of employment. Medicare/Medicaid do not provide cash payments for families, but represent a valuable benefit nonetheless.



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, 72 (or 13% of all homeless households) said someone in their household had recently been released from jail, prison, an inpatient substance abuse treatment program, or psychiatric hospital. Compared to 2008, this is a 28% decrease in homeless re-entry cases. Compared to 2019, homeless re-entry from jail, prison, juvenile detention, an inpatient substance abuse treatment program, and psychiatric hospital, decreased by 15%.

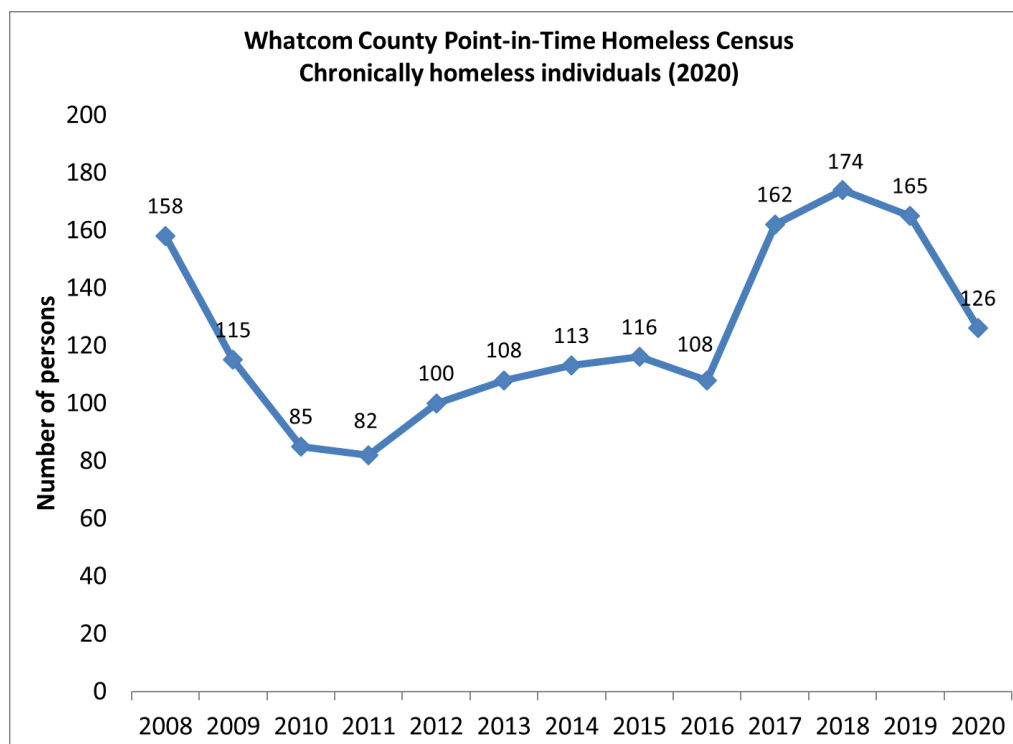


NOTE: A few respondents had been released recently from multiple types of institutions, so simply adding up the number of releases for any given year will not accurately count the number of persons represented. For example, in 2020, 72 persons had a total of 81 releases ($55+9+16+1=81$)

Chronic Homelessness

Based on HUD's definition⁸, **126 unaccompanied households, or 23%** of all 555 homeless households, were chronically homeless. This is a 20% decrease from 2008 and represents the investments the community has made in Permanent Supportive Housing resources. Over the years, we have improved our ability to gather information on disability status; however, it is not possible to definitively determine chronic homelessness status from the survey. The HUD definition of chronic homelessness is complicated and cannot be definitively determined without conducting a more in-depth assessment.

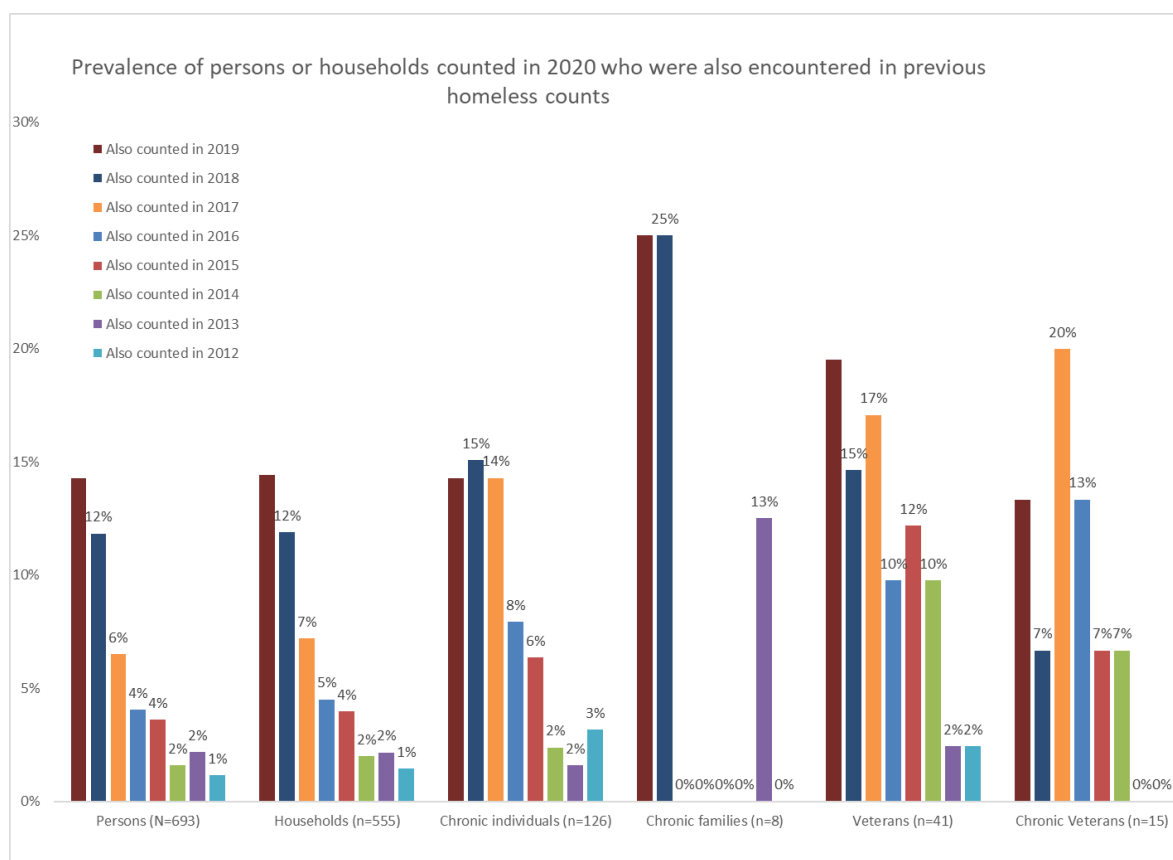
Skyrocketing rental prices and historically low vacancy rates continue to create an extremely tight rental market that forces many of our community members to wait longer for housing, and has contributed to this increase.



⁸ 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 four episodes of homelessness in the last three years AND those episodes must total 12 months 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 use disorder, permanent physical, or developmental disability).

Persistence of Homelessness

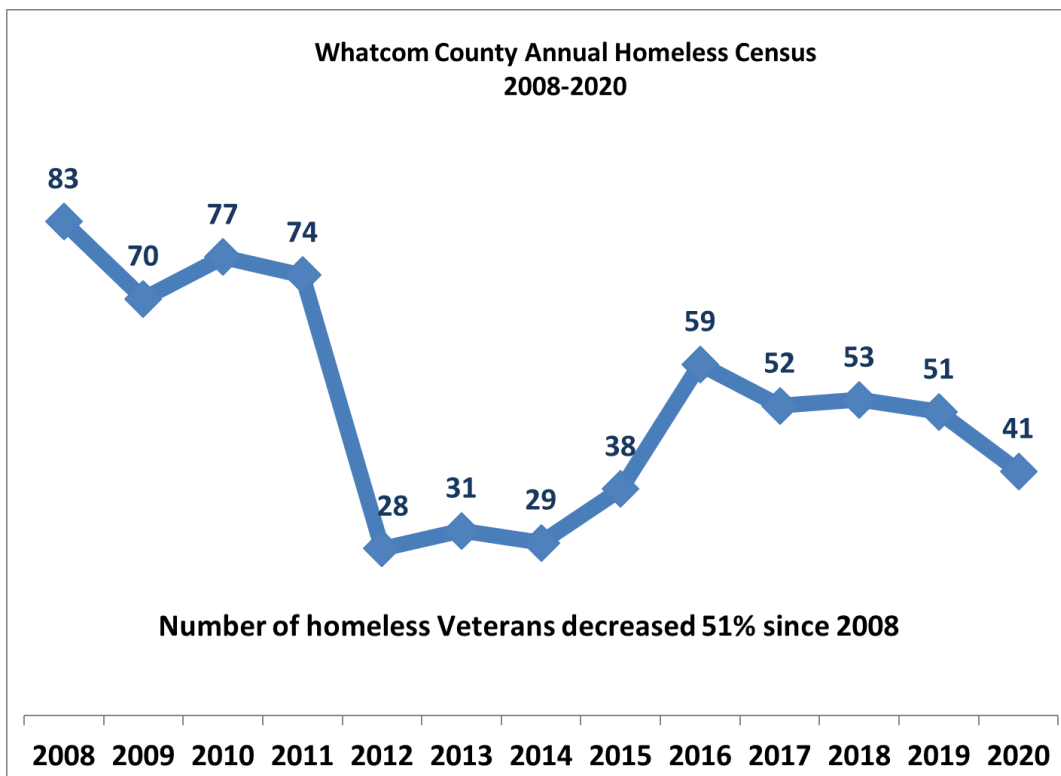
Altogether, 14% of the homeless households we encountered in 2020 were also encountered in 2019; 12% were also encountered in 2018, 7% were also encountered in 2017, 5% were also encountered in 2016; 4% were also encountered in 2015; 2% were also encountered in 2014, 2% were also encountered in 2013 and 1% were also encountered in 2012. In other words, 7% of homeless households encountered in 2017 have been continuously homeless for at least three years, OR, they have been housed and become homeless again during that time interval. Unfortunately, as people wait longer for housing, their vulnerability increases and their physical and mental health tend to decline, as observed by worsening scores in vulnerability assessments by our Coordinated Entry System.

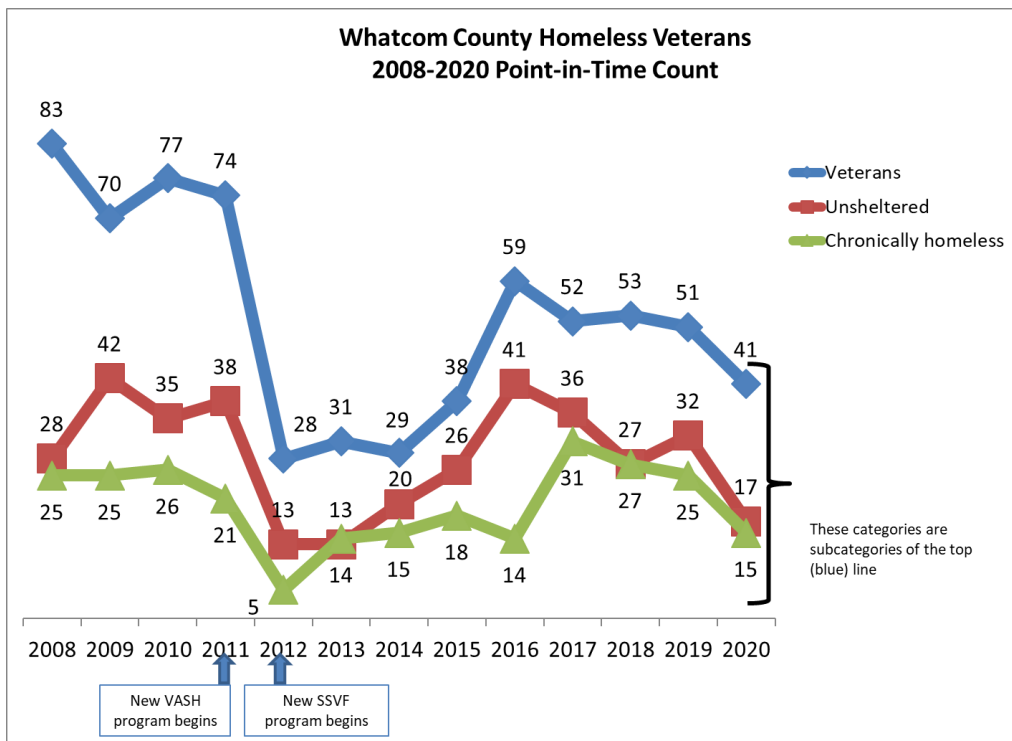


Homeless Veterans

Over the past seven years, nonprofit service providers, the Veteran's Administration, and Whatcom County government have devoted an unprecedented effort toward ending homelessness among local Veterans. Yet we still face an uphill battle ending homelessness for our community's Veterans.

Since 2008, the number of chronically homeless Veterans encountered during the annual homeless census has decreased by 40%. This year we encountered 41 homeless Veterans in 41 households; 17 of these Veterans were unsheltered, and 15 were chronically homeless. Despite the progress in recent years in reducing homelessness experienced by Veterans, additional resources are necessary to achieve our objective of ending homelessness for all Veterans.





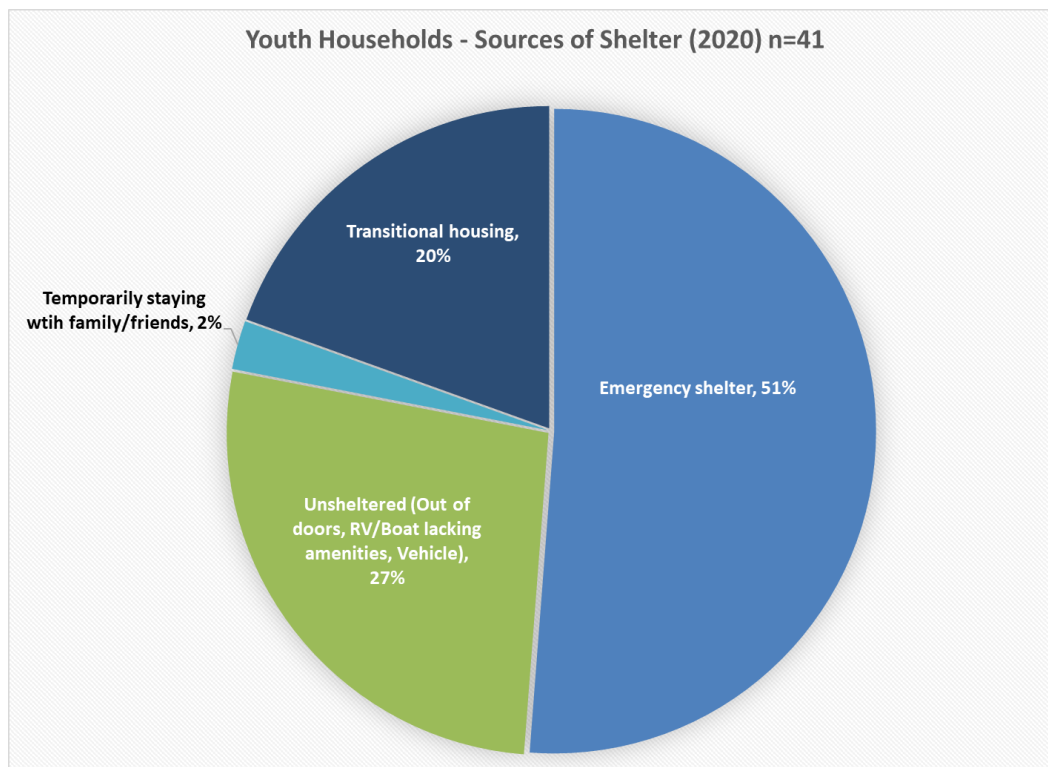
Part B: Youth Count! 2020

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 2020 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 by way of using the same volunteer pool and the same count training. However, the Youth Count differed in other ways: a specialized youth-focused interview form was used, focused training on LGBTQ and youth homeless was delivered, and targeted surveys administered at Northwest Youth Service's Ground Floor program. 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 homeless⁹.

Sources of Shelter for Youth Households



⁹ Literally homeless means people who are staying unsheltered, in emergency shelter, or in homeless transitional housing

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 41 youth households; one of them consisted of minors (under 18 years old) with no adults in the household, and 40 had a young adult (aged 18-24) as head of household.

Most of these households (31 of 41) were single, unaccompanied individuals; 4 households were families with children, and 3 youth households consisted of families without children (e.g. couples).

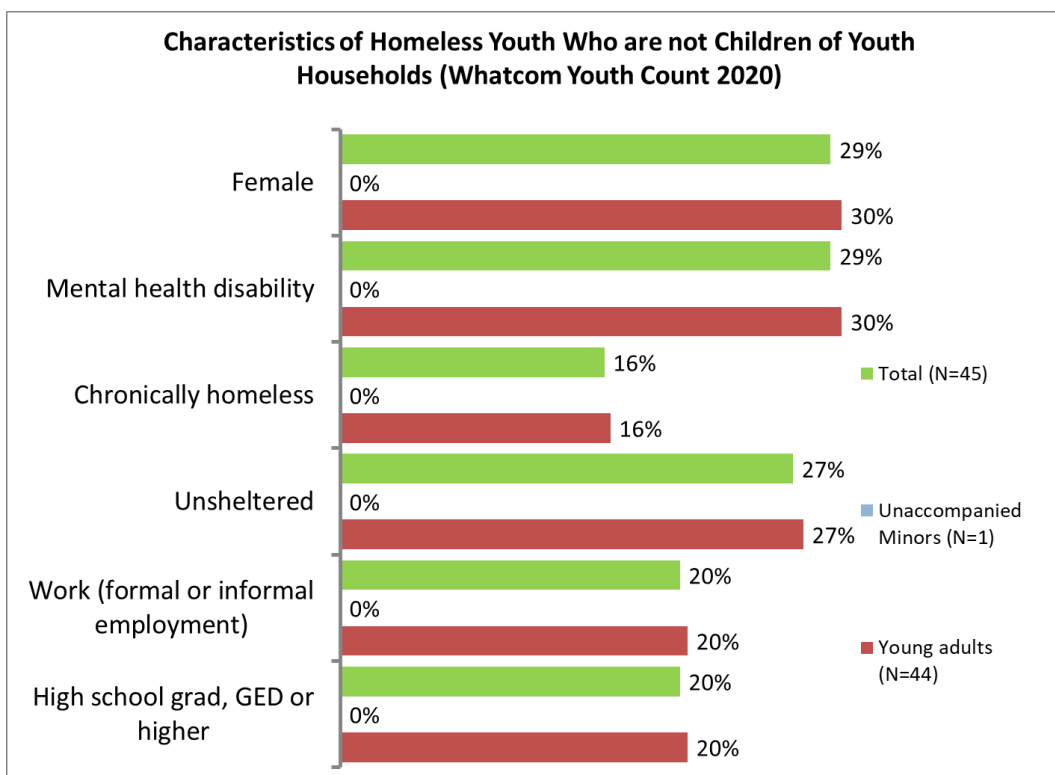
Within these 41 households were 52 persons, over half of whom (33) were single, unaccompanied individuals. There were 6 young adults (ages 18-24) in families with children; and 7 children who were part of those families.

Total Youth Count of unaccompanied youth households age 13-24	41
Minor heads of household	1
Young adult heads of household	40
Household type	41
Families with children	5
Families without children	3
Single, unaccompanied households	33
Total Youth Count number of persons	52
Young adults in families with children	6
Children in families with children	7
Unaccompanied minors	1
Persons in adults no children households (couples)	6
Singles	32

Characteristics of Minors and Young Adults Who are not Children of Youth Count Households

There were 45 persons counted in Youth Count households who were not children of parenting households. This section describes the characteristics of those persons.

Most (44) of the 46 persons were young adults ages 18-24; the rest (1) were minors, under 18 years old. There were fewer self-identified females (30%) counted than self-identified males among young adults; none of the minors self-identified as female.

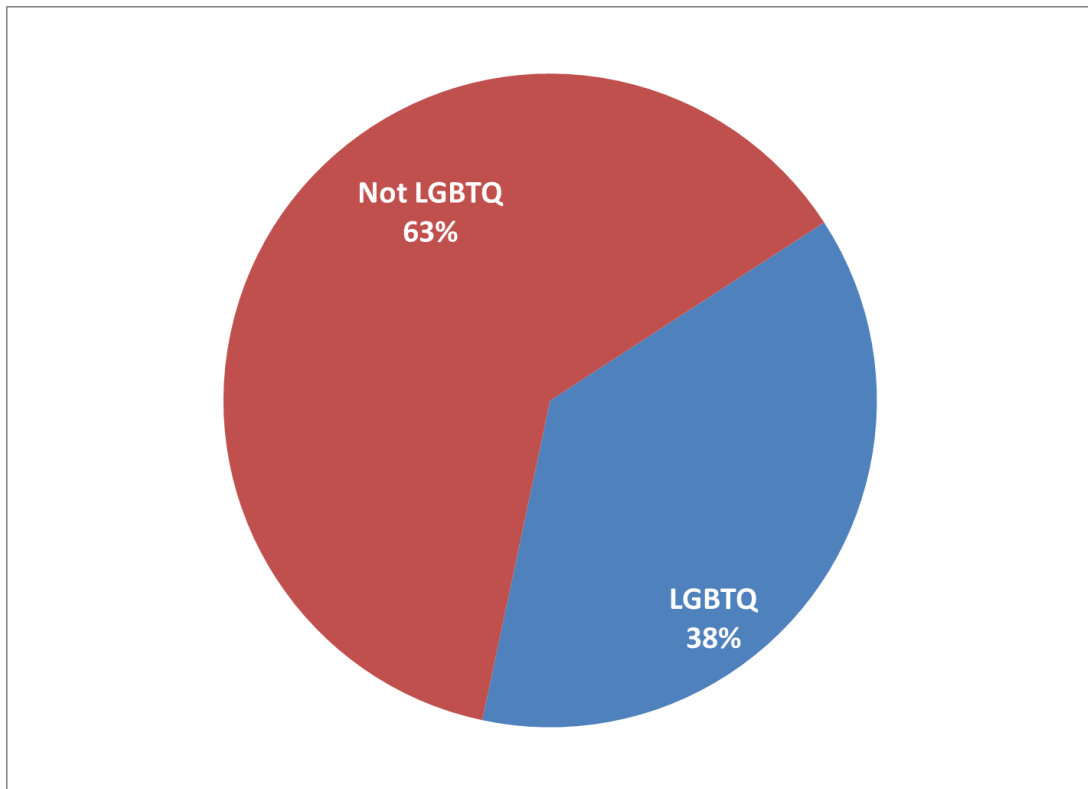


None of the minors were unsheltered (0%), compared to 27% of young adults.

Unaccompanied minors were more likely to be working for income (27%) compared to the young adults we encountered (0%). Twenty percent of young adults had completed high school or a GED.

LGBTQ Youth and Young Adults

Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ) homeless youth make up a disproportionate number of the overall homeless youth population across the nation and that continues to be the case 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 2020 Whatcom County Youth Count found that 38% of youth who answered the sexual orientation and/or the transgender question identified as LGBTQ.

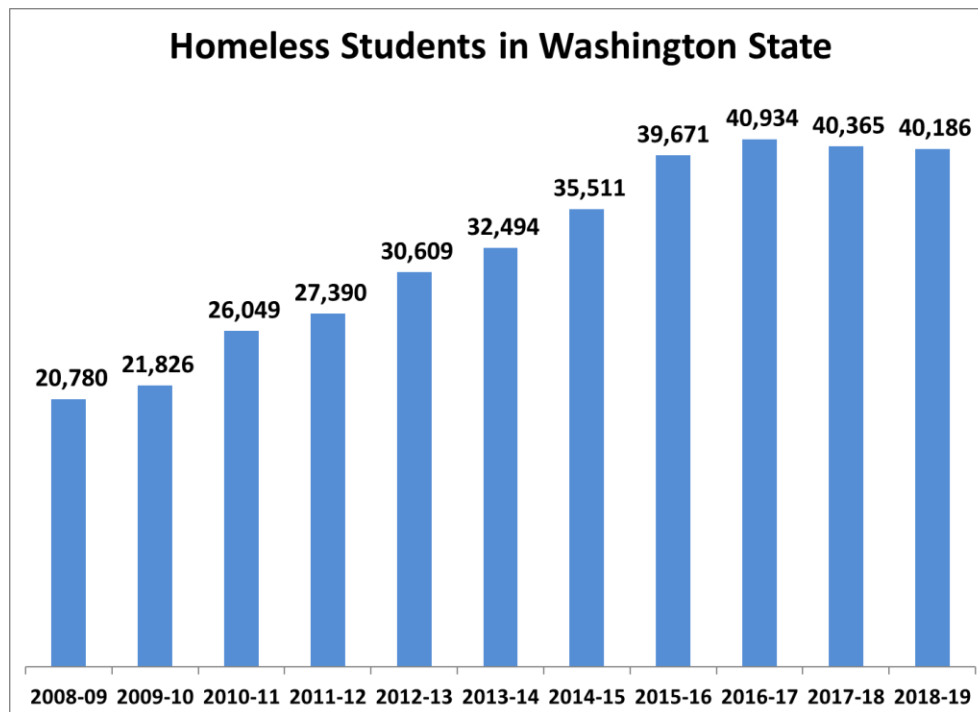


Part C: Homelessness of Public School Students

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 school years 2008-2009 and 2018-2019.

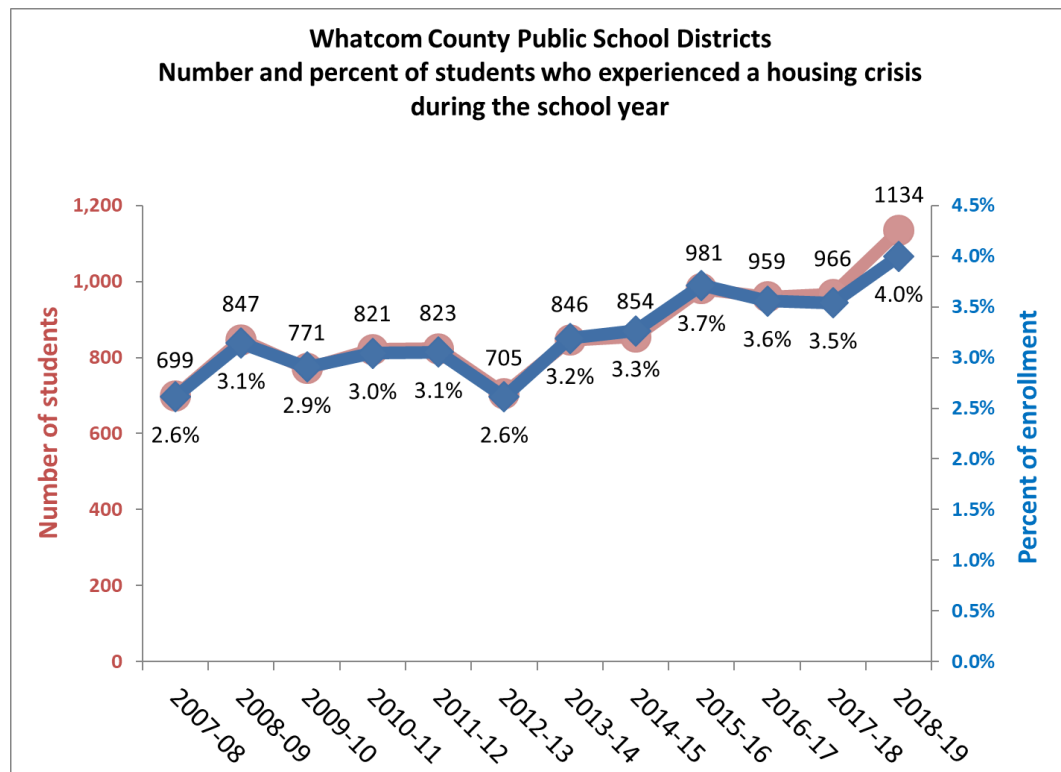
There was an astounding 93% increase over this period, notwithstanding the modest decrease in the last two reporting school years. (Note that these figures reflect the definition of homeless children included in Subtitle VII-B of the McKinney-Vento Act¹⁰, a definition that is different than the one used 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. Secondly, 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 households residing in a hotel or motel.

¹⁰ 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 2012-13 the data suggests a return to pre-recession levels. However, a surge in homelessness is evident between school years 2013-2014 and 2014-2015, and that surge essentially continued into the 2018-2019 school year (the most recent data available at the time of this report). As a percentage of school enrollments, 4% of students experienced homelessness during the 2018-2019 school year, representing an increase from 3.5% last year.



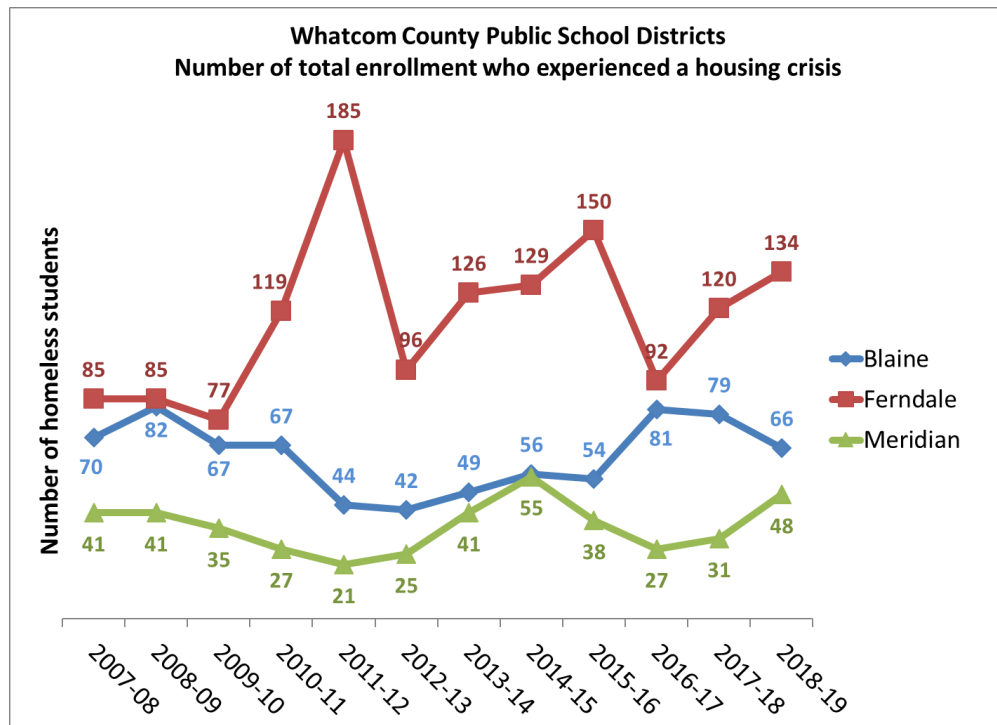
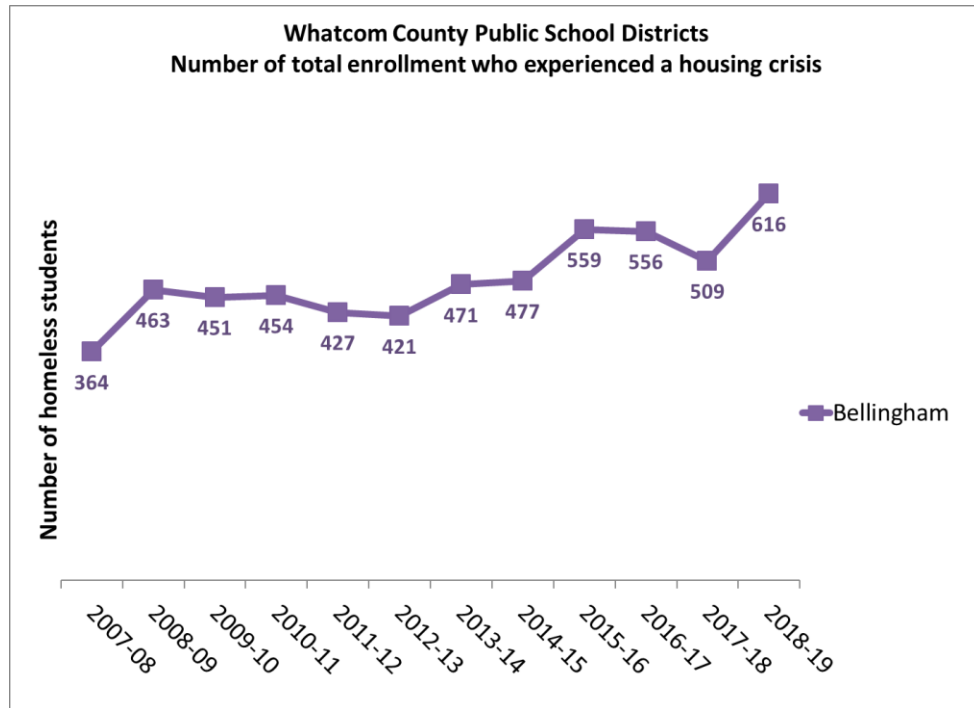
Public school homeless statistics by district. The charts below show the number of homeless students counted in each school district from 2007-08 to 2017-18 school years. Blaine and Nooksack saw sharp increases in homelessness between 2007-08 and 2008-09, but then leveled off or declined in subsequent years. Nooksack's number of homeless students has been increasing from 2015-16 and again in 2016-17 but went down slightly from 69 students in 2016-17 to 65 students in the 2017-18 school year, and went up again from 65 students in the 2017-18 year to 80 students in the 2018-19 school year. Blaine reported a big increase in the 2016-17 year to 81, very close to the record year of 2008-2009 (82) and has declined in the 2018-19 school year to 66 students.

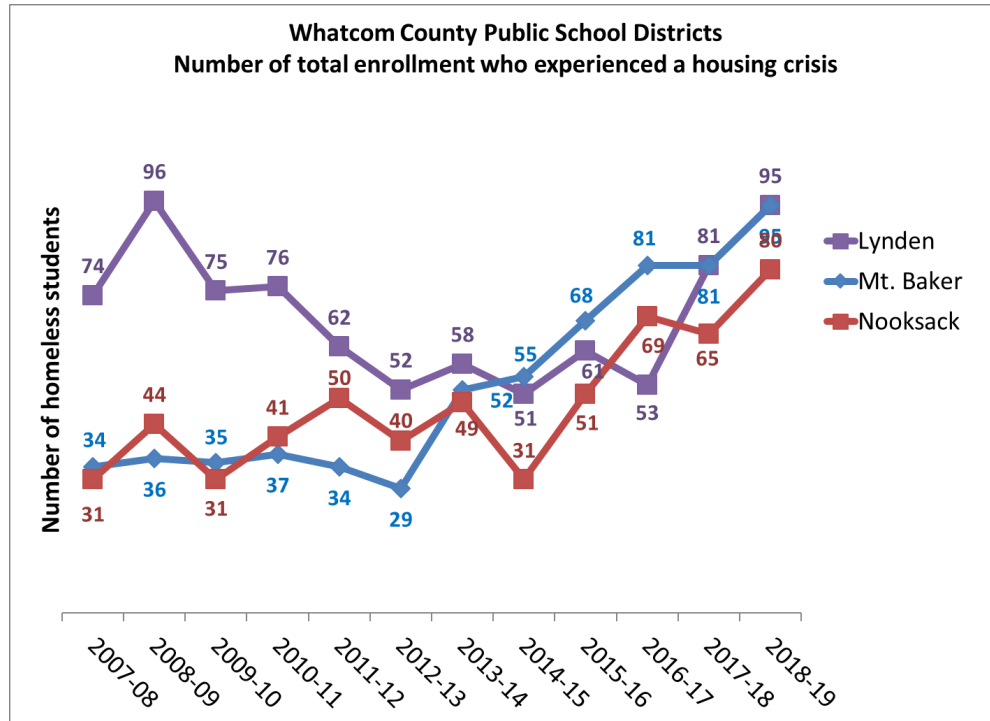
Bellingham followed that same pattern until the most recently reported period between 2012-13 and 2015-16 when homelessness increased 33% from 421 to 559 students. During the 2018-19 school year the number of homeless students increased by 21% compared to the prior year

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. This was in turn followed by another sharp increase in 2013-14. The amount of students who experienced homelessness in 2015-16 increased slightly to 150, sharply declined in 2016-17 to 92, increased again in the 2017-18 school year to 120 students and again in the 2018-19 school year to 134 students.

Mount Baker also saw a sharp increase between 2012-13 and 2013-14, counting 52 students as homeless. Mount Baker's number of homeless students in 2016-17 increased to 81 compared to the prior year (2015-16; 68) and set a new district record high count of homeless students. The number of homeless students in that district remained at 81 in the 2017-18 school year, and went up to 95 in the 2018-19 school year.

After measuring a steady decline in homeless students from 2008-09 through 2011-12, Meridian School District exceeded its highest measured homeless student population count with 55 students during the 2014-15 school year. In 2015-16, 38 students experienced homelessness marking a substantial decrease. This decrease continued in the 2016-17 school year with 27 homeless students. The 2017-18 school year showed a slight increase from 27 students the year prior to 31 students. The 2018-19 school year showed another increase from 31 to 48 students.





Homelessness and academic achievement¹¹

Basic 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”. 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. The level of funding for subgrants is based on the needs of the LEAs [Lead Educational Agency] 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, including those living in doubled-up situations, 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.

¹¹ 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 recruited to participate in the count. Participating agencies then 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 with completion of 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 will complete paper questionnaires for their clients. This is the 9th 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 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 respondents¹². 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.

¹² 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 gender, date of birth and initials.