



East Texas
Human Needs Network

2013 SMITH COUNTY HOMELESSNESS ASSESSMENT REPORT

Contents

Acknowledgements.....	3
Introduction.....	4
Key Findings.....	5
Definitions of Terms	6
Resources:	7
The Survey and Count	8
Household Types.....	9
Demographics	9
Children.....	10
Unaccompanied Youth.....	10
Veterans	11
Last Night.....	12
Smith County Inventory of Beds	12
Length of homelessness	13
Chronic vs. Episodic	13
Where Respondent Became Homeless	14
Reasons for Becoming Homeless	15
Factors Contributing to Homelessness	15
Employment.....	17
Education	18
Housing Needed.....	19
Housing Affordability	19
Services Needed.....	20
Unmet Clinical Care.....	21
People with Complex Health Needs	21
History of Treatment Services and Institutional Stays.....	22
People Involved in Criminal Justice	23
Poverty	23
Responding to the needs	24
What is a Continuum of Care?.....	24
TYLER / SMITH COUNTY – CONTINUUM OF CARE FLOW OF SERVICES	25
Recommendations.....	26
National, State, and Local Plan.....	26

Acknowledgements

2013 Annual Homelessness Assessment Report

Report prepared by:

Christina Fulsom, East Texas Human Needs Network
Texas Homeless Network

Point in Time Homeless Survey and Count Planning Committee

Phil Anderson, Community Volunteer
Carla Carlock-Self, Andrews Center
Rev. Antonio Christian, Hiway 80 Rescue Mission
Jimmy Criswell, Gateway to Hope
Christina Fulsom, East Texas Human Needs Network
Julie Goodgame, The Salvation Army
Greg Grubb, People Attempting To Help
Stephanie Guzman, East Texas Crisis Center
Andrea Wilson, The Salvation Army

Special thanks to:

Ken Martin, Chief Executive Officer Texas Homeless Network
Eric Samuels, Texas Homeless Network Balance of State Manager
Lindsay Marsh, Texas Homeless Network Balance of State Data Coordinator
City of Tyler Police Department for escorting teams on the night of the survey
Eighty-eight community volunteers assisted with the survey and data entry



East Texas
Human Needs Network

ETHNN
Christina Fulsom
christina@ethnn.org
903.216.3211
www.ETHNN.org

Introduction

When trying to determine who is homeless in Smith County, a wide variety of barriers exist. Often, there isn't an easy way to establish who is homeless because definitions of homelessness vary. In addition, strategies for obtaining information are complex, diverse, and variable. Many experiencing homelessness do not wish to be found or represented as "homeless." Therefore, organizations face unique challenges when working to curb the rising numbers of individuals and families suffering from poverty in Smith County and around the state, not to mention the many difficulties encountered when providing needed services and care.

Recognizing homelessness as an often temporary circumstance rather than a permanent condition is essential in gathering information about the homeless population. Furthermore, regardless of which definition is being used, simply finding those who fit the definition of homeless to participate in a survey, or in another way to be counted, is challenging. Our research is conducted at locations known to be frequented by people who are homeless. Institutional locations include places such as shelters, soup kitchens, day centers, and service centers. Non-institutional locations include streets, parks, or abandoned buildings; these locations can become particularly dangerous in Texas, with days of staggering heat in the summer and freezing temperatures in winter. More difficult to identify are those staying temporarily with family or friends, those staying in hotels or living in cars, those congregating in places not known to or accessible to researchers. Many remain transient at all times. For these reasons, data on homelessness are usually considered to be underestimates.

As the only homeless-advocacy organization in Smith County, the East Texas Human Needs Network, formerly the Smith County Coalition for the Homeless, has made several efforts to assess the size, characteristics, and needs of the homeless population in order to inform policy makers and service providers. Over the past nine years, Texas Homeless Network (THN) has addressed this issue, refining its methodology and adding to what is known about the problem of homelessness in Texas.

The East Texas Human Needs Network (ETHNN) is a member of the Texas Homeless Network Balance of State Continuum of Care. To learn more about ETHNN, please visit www.ethnn.org.

Key Findings

Homelessness by the numbers:

- 238 homeless persons were found on the night of January 24, 2013. Of those identified that night, 181 (76%) were adults and 57 (24%) were children.
- Point in time homeless estimate is 435 people on any given night with an annualized homeless estimate of 961 moving in and out of homelessness in one year.
- Thirty-nine percent of homeless respondents were female, an increase of 6%; 61% were male.
- Many races and ethnicities are represented in the Smith County homeless population with 71% identifying as white and 25% identifying as African-American. Nearly 10% stated their ethnicity was of Hispanic/Latino descent.
- Across the spectrum, single individuals represent the highest percent of respondents in our surveyed population at 74%. Homelessness in Families with children continues to rise and makes up 18% of the population.
- Median age of adults was 41 years old; children's median age was 10 years old.
- Military veterans are homeless at a higher rate than other groups. In Smith County, 21% of our surveyed populations are classified as veterans, a 2% increase over last year. Sadly, 70% of those identified are not receiving VA benefits.

Homelessness trends:

- There was a decrease in the number of people staying on the streets, those precariously housed, and those in transitional housing; this resulted in a shift with more of those individuals seeking assistance from Emergency Shelters*
- First time homelessness remains the same at 56%.
- Chronic homelessness, those homeless continuously for a year or more, or those experiencing homelessness at least four times in the past three years decreased 4%.
- Those experiencing homelessness two to three times in the past three years decreased by 5%.
- Those experiencing homelessness are remaining homeless longer periods of time, in 2010 the average homelessness lasted 90 days, this year the average homelessness lasts 150 days.

Reasons for homelessness:

- Lack of employment and the inability to pay rent or mortgages are the most significant reasons for becoming homeless 39% and 30%, divorce accounts for 19%, and domestic violence accounts for 16%.
- Historically, the number one reason for unemployment is lack of transportation.

Self reported needs of those experiencing homelessness:

- Top five needs are transportation (55%), basic needs (food/clothing) (54%) job training and placement (53%), Food stamps (46%) and case management (32%).

Definitions of Terms

At Risk of Homelessness means, with respect to an individual or family, that the individual or family—

- has income below 30 percent median income for the geographic area;
- has insufficient resources immediately available to attain housing stability; and
- - a. has moved frequently because of economic reasons;
 - b. is living in the home of another because of economic hardship;
 - c. has been notified that their right to occupy their current housing or living situation will be terminated;
 - d. lives in a hotel or motel;
 - e. lives in severely overcrowded housing;
 - f. is exiting an institution; or
 - g. otherwise lives in housing that has characteristics associated with instability and an increased risk of homelessness

Continuums of Care (CoC) are local planning bodies responsible for coordinating the full range of homeless services in a geographic area, which may cover a city, county, metropolitan area, or even an entire state. *Smith County is a member of the Texas Homeless Network Balance of State CoC*

Chronic Homelessness refers to an individual who has been continuously homeless for a year or more or has experienced at least four episodes of

homelessness in the last three years and has a disability.

Emergency Shelter is a facility with the primary purpose of providing temporary shelter to homeless persons.

Homeless

- People who are living in a place not meant for human habitation, in emergency shelter, in transitional housing, or are exiting an institution where they temporarily resided. The only significant change from existing practice is that people will be considered homeless if they are exiting an institution where they resided for up to 90 days (it was previously 30 days), and were in shelter or a place not meant for human habitation immediately prior to entering that institution.
- People who are losing their primary nighttime residence, which may include a motel or hotel or a doubled up situation, within 14 days and lack resources or support networks to remain in housing. HUD had previously allowed people who were being displaced within 7 days to be considered homeless. The proposed regulation also describes specific documentation requirements for this category.
- Families with children or unaccompanied youth who are unstably housed and likely to continue in that state. This is a new category of homelessness, and it applies to families with children or unaccompanied youth who have not had a lease or ownership interest in a housing unit in the last

60 or more days, have had two or more moves in the last 60 days, and who are likely to continue to be unstably housed because of disability or multiple barriers to employment.

- People who are fleeing or attempting to flee domestic violence, have no other residence, and lack the resources or support networks to obtain other permanent housing. This category is similar to the current practice regarding people who are fleeing domestic violence.

Individuals refer to people who are not part of a family during their episode of homelessness. They are homeless as single adults, unaccompanied youth, or in multiple adult or multiple-child households.

Permanent Supportive Housing is permanent housing in which supportive services are provided to assist homeless persons with a disability to live independently.

Persons in Families are people who are homeless as part of households that have at least one adult and one child.

Safe Havens provide private or semi-private long-term housing for homeless people with severe mental illness and are limited to serving no more than 25 people within a facility.

Sheltered Homeless Persons are people who are staying in emergency shelters, transitional housing programs, or safe havens.

Transitional Housing Program is a type of housing where homeless people may stay and receive supportive services for up to 24 months, and which are designed to enable them to move into permanent housing.

Unsheltered Homeless Persons include people who live in places not meant for human habitation, such as the streets, campgrounds, abandoned buildings, vehicles, or parks.

Resources:

United States Interagency Council on Homelessness <http://www.usich.gov/>

National Alliance to End Homelessness <http://www.endhomelessness.org/>

Texas Interagency Council for the Homeless <http://www.tdhca.state.tx.us/tich/>

Texas Homeless Network <http://www.thn.org/>

Corporation for Supportive Housing <http://www.csh.org/>

National Low Income Housing Coalition <http://nlihc.org/>

Texas Homeless Education Office <http://www.utdanacenter.org/theo/>

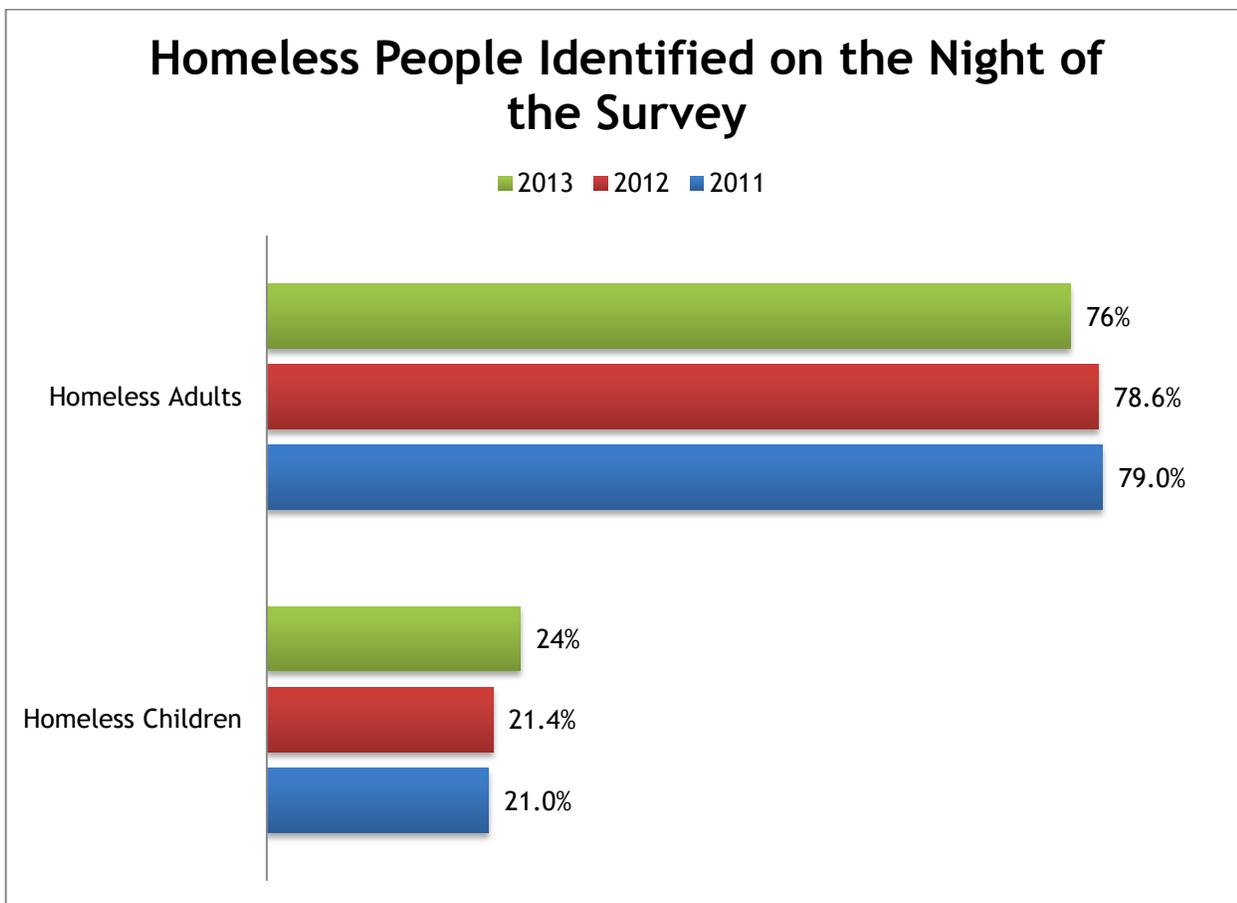
National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty <http://www.nlchp.org/>

Center for Public Policy Priorities <http://forabettertexas.org/>

The Survey and Count

Texas Homeless Network annually coordinates a Point-in-Time (PIT) homeless survey with coalitions across 203 counties in Texas. The East Texas Human Needs Network is one of the participants covering Smith County.

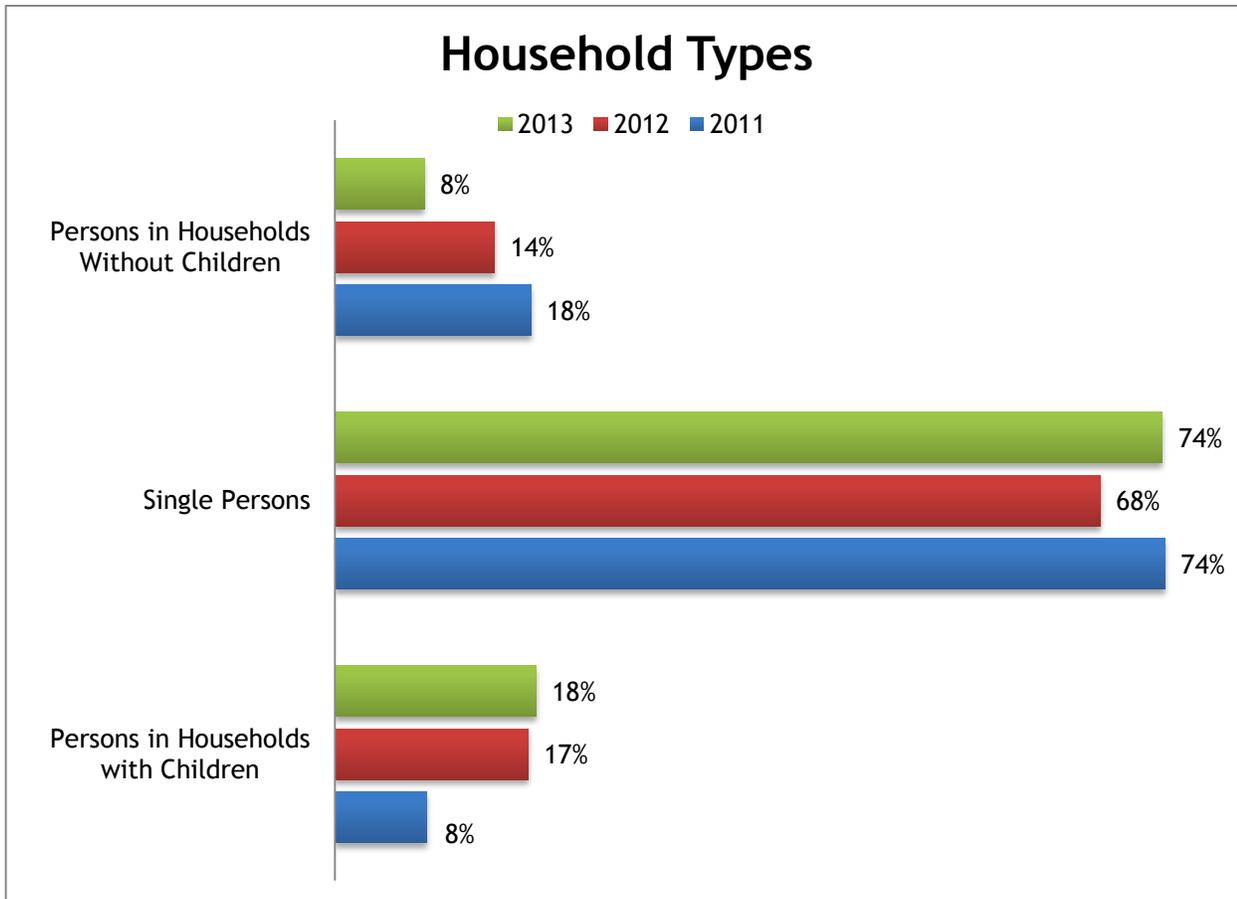
The 2013 Point in Time Homeless Survey and Count took place on Thursday, January 24. Volunteers use what is known as the “known location” methodology to survey persons found at sites identified by the community to be where those suffering from homelessness are known to congregate. The resulting survey sample represents people in homeless situations and persons who are at risk of becoming homeless. The number of survey responses does not represent the total population suffering from homelessness, so estimates based on HUD approved guidelines are provided in PIT reports. This information is used by local communities in the development of short and long term strategies to alleviate homelessness.



238 homeless persons were found on the night of January 24, 2013. Of those identified that night, 181 (76%) were adults and 57 (24%) were children. Point in time homeless estimate is 435 people on any given night with an annualized homeless estimate of 961 people moving in and out of homelessness in one year.

Household Types

Homelessness in Smith County affects every corner of our society; the face of homelessness is constantly evolving as new populations become at risk of becoming homeless. By looking at data from different aspects, we are able to begin to see trends emerging in certain homeless populations.



When looking at the type of family unit a person lives in, we can see an increase in the number of families with children who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless.

Across the spectrum, single individuals represent the highest percent of respondents in our surveyed population at 74%, an increase of 6%. Persons in households without children decreased 6%. However, **homelessness in Families with children rose 10% since 2011.**

Demographics

Gender		Race		Ethnicity	Median Age
Male	61.6%	White	70.8%	Hispanic	41
Female	39.4%	Black	25.4%	9.7%	
		Other	3.8%		

Female homelessness now makes up 4 out of 10 homeless; this also corresponds to the number of homeless families with children.

Children

Children experiencing homelessness face great challenges. High mobility, precarious living conditions, and poverty combine to present significant educational, health and emotional difficulties. Consider this:

- *At least 20% of homeless children do not attend school.*ⁱ
- *Within a year, 41% of homeless children will attend two different schools;*
- *28% of homeless children will attend three or more different schools.*ⁱⁱ
- *With each change in schools, a student is set back academically by an average of four to six months.*ⁱⁱⁱ
- *Children experiencing homelessness often feel like outsiders and have difficulty maintaining friendships due to frequent moves. Their lives feel out of control, and they often experience anxiety and depression as a result.*
- *Many homeless children lack basic school supplies and a reasonable environment in which to do homework.*
- *Unaccompanied youth experiencing homelessness confront these and other challenges associated with homelessness without the support and guidance of a caring adult.*

**24% of the homeless found on the night of the study were children.
Median age is 10 years old.**

Homeless children are America's invisible children. In Texas alone, public schools have identified over 95,000 children who have no place to call home. Often, these children have lost their friends, their toys, their books, their school, their pets, and sometimes even their family. We know these children can succeed in school and life, but without a loving and supportive environment, like unwatered plants, they will shrivel and dry up. We can't afford to lose another generation of children to homelessness.

Barbara Wand James
Texas Homeless Education Office
The University of Texas at Austin

Homeless children are truly among our nation's neediest and most at risk.



Unaccompanied Youth

Unaccompanied youth include young people who have run away from home, been thrown out of their homes, and/or been abandoned by parents or guardians. These children, under the age of 18 are separated from their parents for a variety of reasons. Over half report being physically abused at home, and over one third report sexual abuse.

In Smith County a child under 18 years of age cannot find shelter unless a victim of sexual assault, in which case shelter and services can be provided by the East Texas Crisis Center.

Veterans

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is committed to ending homelessness among veterans within 5 years, but there is a subset of the homeless veteran population that is slipping through the cracks: the most vulnerable homeless veterans. These men and women face complex issues that have kept them trapped in the cycle of homelessness and in a “revolving door” of crisis service systems for decades. If we cannot create the right kinds of housing and services models for the most vulnerable now, we risk allowing the newer generation of veterans returning from current conflicts to become tomorrow’s vulnerable long-term homeless veterans.

The Department of Veterans Affairs stated last year that the number of homeless veterans nationwide had dropped by over 55,000. This is partially due to new funds being initiated into communities around the nation. Unfortunately we don’t see that trend in Tyler/Smith County, at this point, **21% of our surveyed populations are classified as veterans**, a 2% increase over last year.

Facts about the Smith County homeless veteran subpopulation:

- 70% do not receive VA benefits
- Make up 21% of the Smith County homeless population
- 73% White 27% Black
- Ages ranged from 24 to 82 years old
- 24% are homeless for the first time
- 29% are chronically homeless
- 18% suffer from mental illness
- 11% suffer from addiction
- 39% have been in jail or prison
- 14% are employed fulltime
- 15% have Bachelor or Master degree
- 30% served in Vietnam
- 30% served in Afghanistan
- 17% served in Iraq
- Years of service ranged from 2 to 12 years. Median 4 years
- 15% were activated as member of National Guard or Reserves

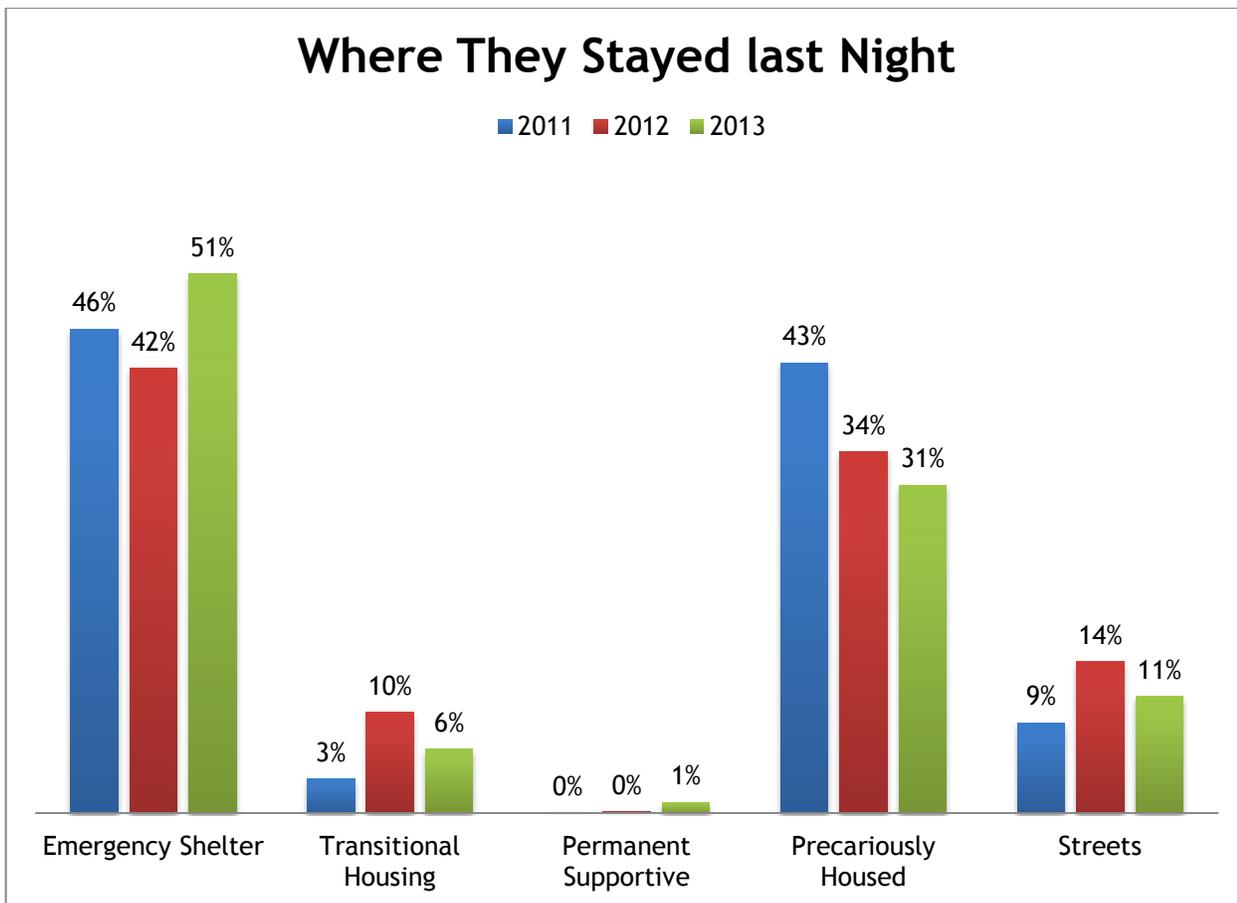


After serving and sacrificing for our country we are seeing a growing number of our veterans who find themselves and their families not only unemployed but also homeless and forgotten.

Retired Major General John T. Furlow
Veterans and Community Roundtable
City of Tyler

Veterans are twice as likely as other Americans to become chronically homeless.^{iv}

Last Night



There was a decrease in the number of people staying on the streets, those precariously housed, and those in transitional housing; this resulted in a shift with more of those individuals seeking assistance from Emergency Shelters*.

Smith County Inventory of Beds

An inventory of beds is conducted on the same night as the Point in Time Homeless Survey and Count.

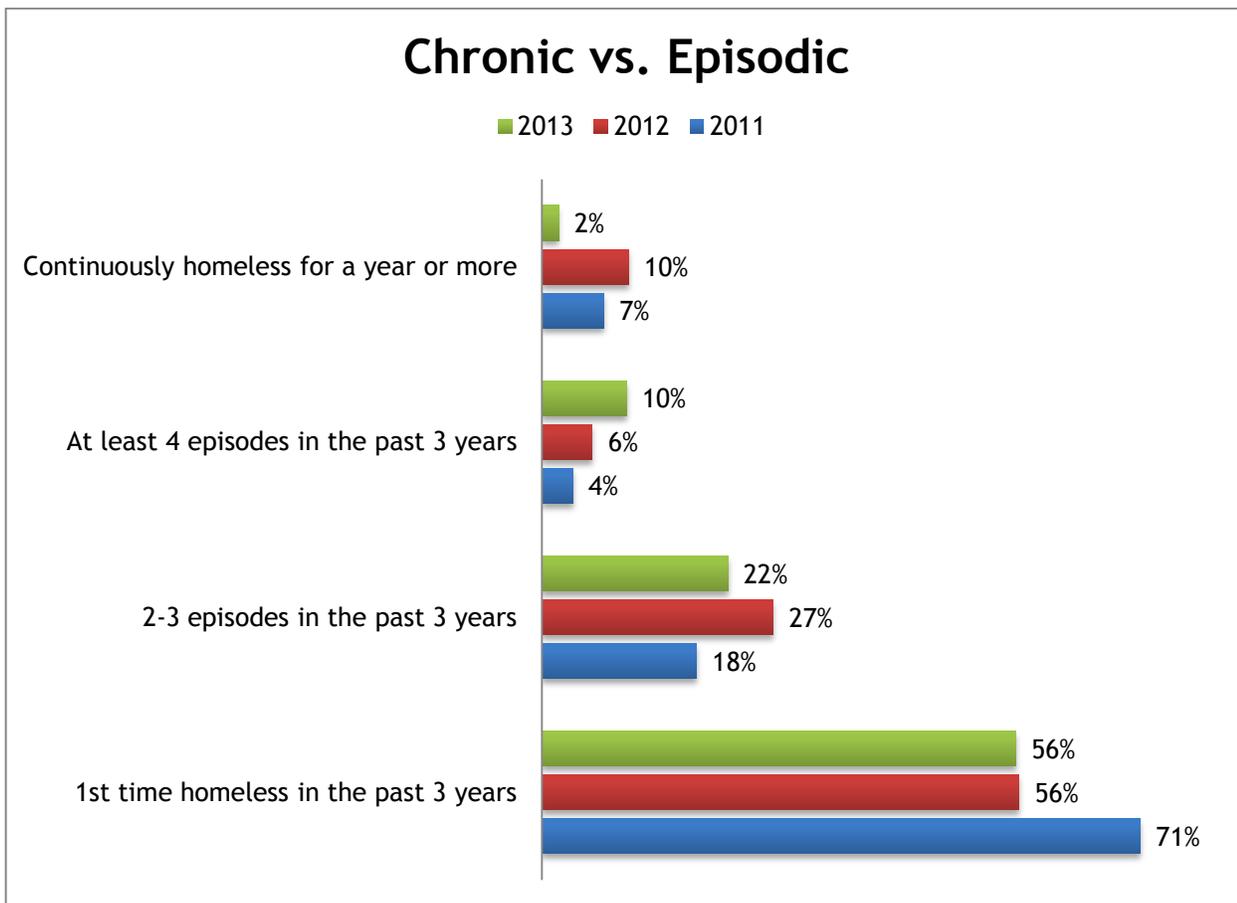
- 315 beds were available on January 24, 2013.
- 121* beds were in Emergency Shelters (38%).
- 169* beds were in Transitional Housing programs (54%).
- 25 beds were in Permanent Supportive Housing (8%) (Veterans only).

** In the last year, due to increased need, it became necessary for The Salvation Army to devote more beds to Emergency Shelter, which meant a decrease in the number of beds available for transitional housing. In addition, shortage of case management staff reduced the number of clients able to receive Transitional Housing services.*

Length of homelessness

One objective of homeless programs is to make episodes of homelessness as short as possible. Typically, the longer an individual or family is homeless, the more services and support they will need to become stably housed, increasing both the cost and the amount of resources used per case. 2013 studies show the same percentage of newly homeless while those experiencing homelessness multiple times or continuously has decreased. For those experiencing homelessness the median period of time increased from 90 days two years ago to 150 days.

Chronic vs. Episodic



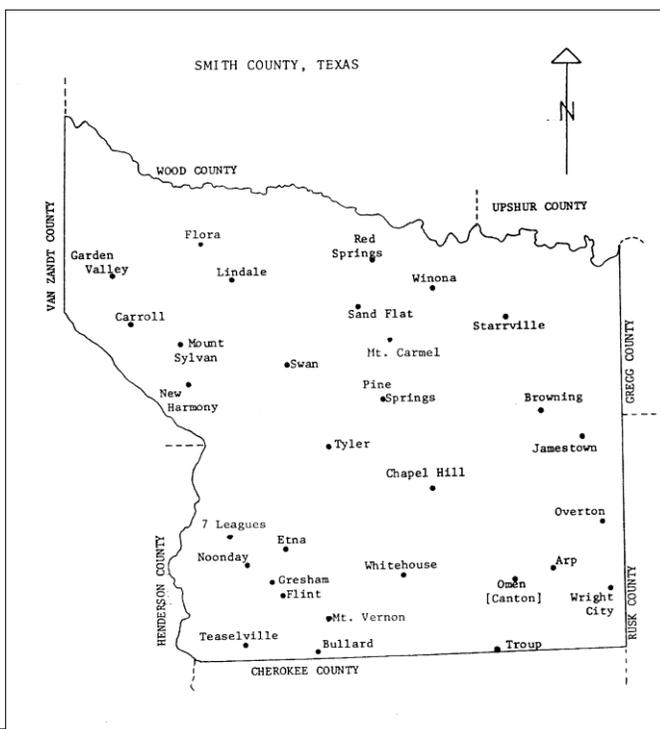
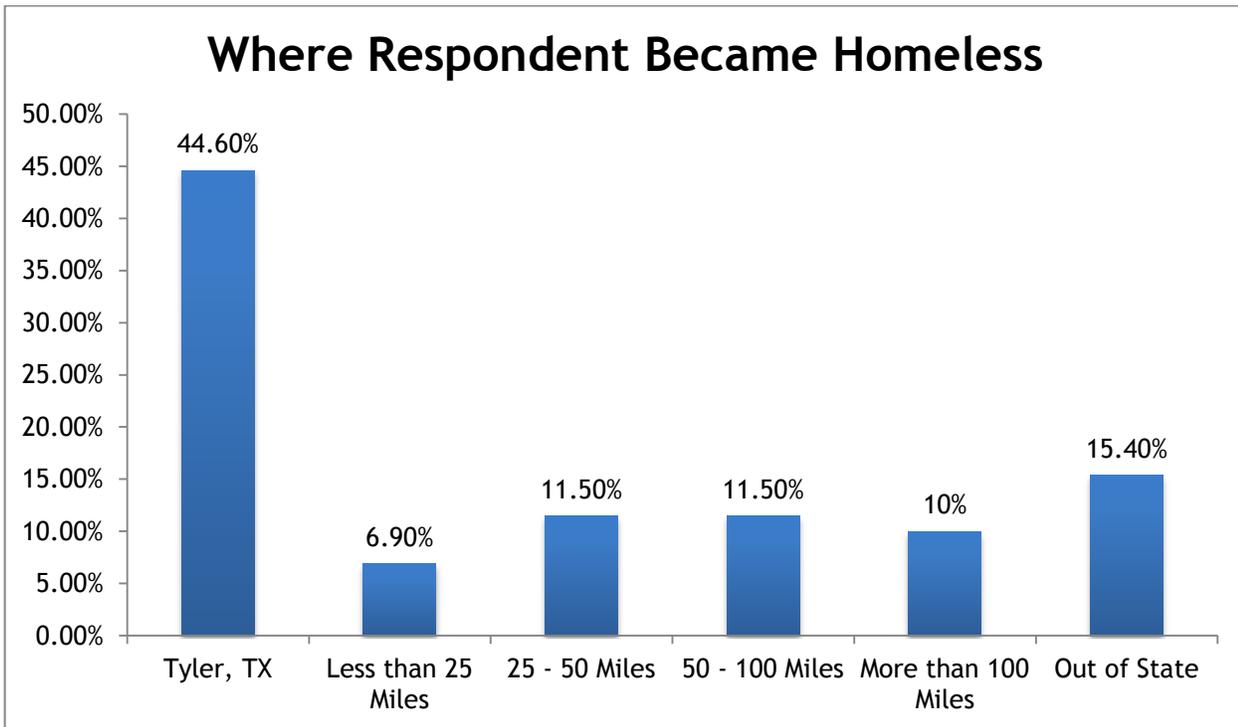
For the first time in seven years, several homelessness markers have decreased. First time homelessness remains the same as last year. There was a decrease of 5% for individuals who experienced 2 to 3 episodes of homelessness in the past 3 years. Chronic Homelessness, defined as an unaccompanied individual with a disability who has either been continuously homeless for a year or more or has experienced at least four episodes of homelessness in the last three years, has decreased from 16% to 12%.

Chronically homeless men and women often have multiple, co-occurring medical, mental health and substance abuse disorders, as well as other barriers to housing stability like histories of trauma and violence and of incarceration. The intensive impact this segment of

homeless people have on emergency systems of care, leads them to use nearly half of the resources in the homeless services system.

Permanent Supportive Housing is designed to provide housing (project-and tenant-based) and supportive services on a long-term basis for individuals who meet the definition of chronically homeless.

Where Respondent Became Homeless



Smith County

Smith County is located in the U.S. state of Texas. As of the 2010 census, its population was 209,714. Its county seat is Tyler.

Area: 949 sq miles (2,458 km²)

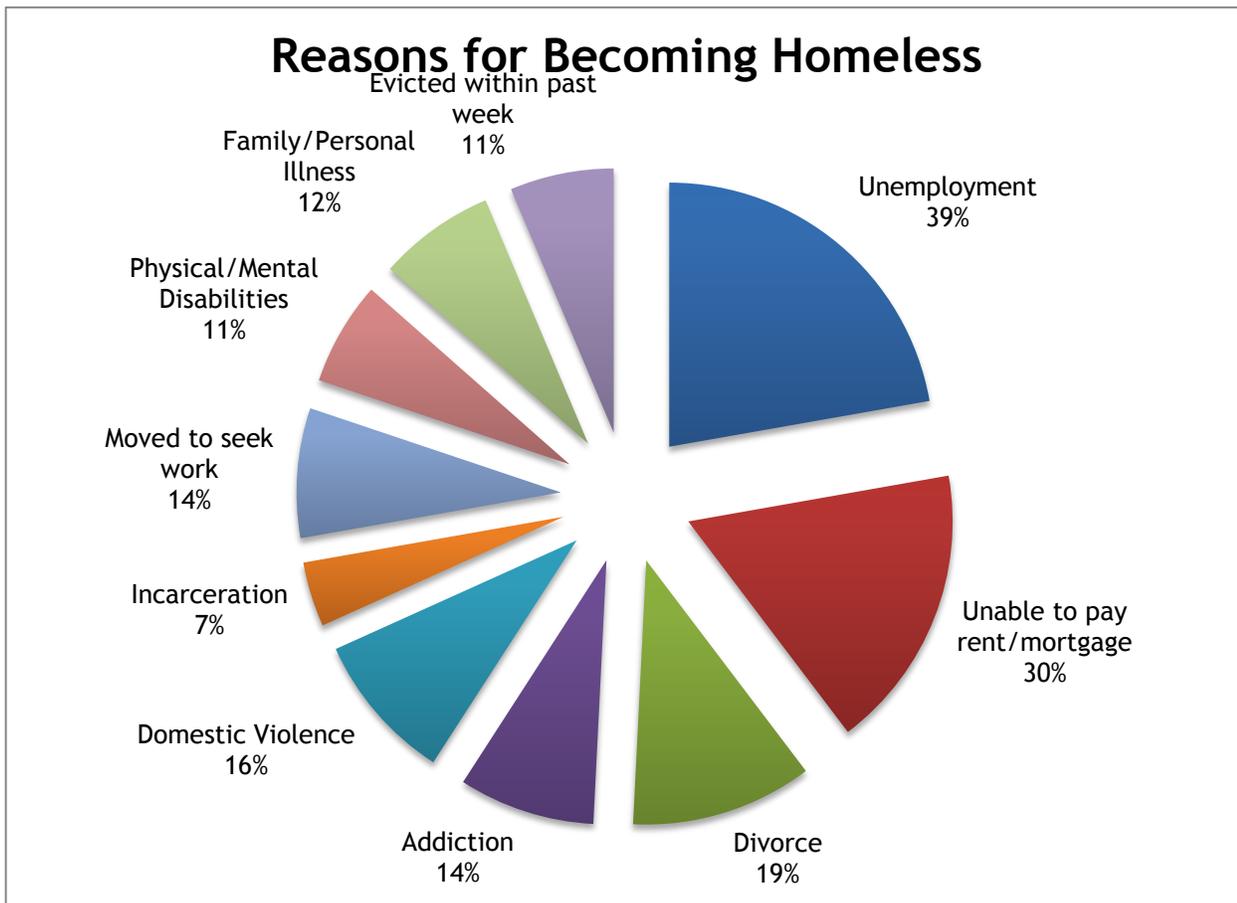
Founded: July 1846

County seat: Tyler

Population: 213,381 (2011)

Unemployment rate: 6.2% (Dec 2012)

Reasons for Becoming Homeless



Lack of employment and the inability to pay rent or mortgages are the most significant reasons for becoming homeless 39% and 30%, divorce accounts for 19%, and domestic violence accounts for 16%.

Factors Contributing to Homelessness

- **Automobile related** - Broken down car, no insurance, tickets, etc.
- **Decline in Public Assistance** - Current TANF benefits and food stamps combined are below the poverty level in every state; in fact, the median TANF benefit for a family of three is approximately one-third of the poverty level. Thus, contrary to popular opinion, welfare does not provide relief from poverty.
- **Divorce** - Divorce often leaves one of the spouses homeless. Most often it's the father, but sometimes it's the mother and children or everyone involved.
- **Domestic Violence** - Battered women who live in poverty are often forced to choose between abusive relationships and homelessness.
- **Drug and Alcohol related problems** - Rates of alcohol and drug abuse are disproportionately high among the homeless population.

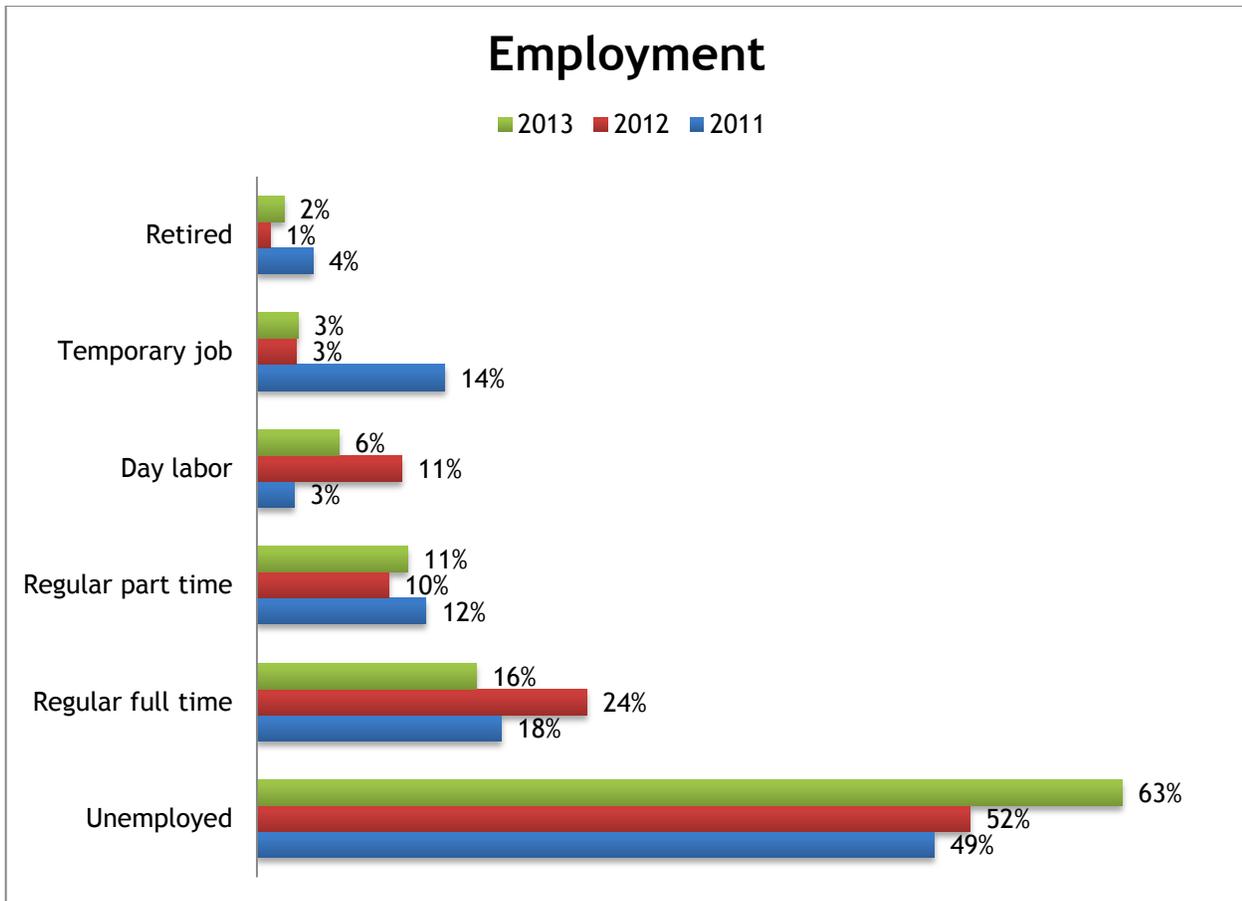
- **Illness** - For families and individuals struggling to pay the rent, a serious illness or disability can start a downward spiral into homelessness, beginning with a lost job, depletion of savings to pay for care, and eventual eviction.
- **Job loss** - No income to pay rent.
- **Lack of affordable housing**- The lack of affordable housing has led to high rent burdens (rents which absorb a high proportion of income), overcrowding, and substandard housing.
- **Lack of child support** - In families where child support is ordered but not paid, the decrease in income can lead to an inability to pay rent, utilities, or both.
- **Low wages** - Declining wages have put housing out of reach for many workers: in Smith County, \$15.17/hour is required to afford a three-bedroom apartment at Fair Market Rent.
- **Mental Illness** - Approximately 14% of the single adult homeless population suffer from some form of severe and persistent mental illness.
- **Physical Disabilities** - Disabled individuals may be unable to work or find appropriate employment. For those receiving SSI, they often struggle to obtain and maintain stable housing.
- **Post Traumatic Stress Disorder** - This disorder is common with veterans and those that have been in violent situations. It can make it difficult to have a stable life.
- **Poverty** - Being poor means being an illness, an accident, or a paycheck away from living on the streets.
- **Roommates** - When one or more roommates falls through with their end of the bargain, they can be a reason for others becoming homeless.
- **Severe Depression** - Can make it impossible for an individual to maintain a stable life.
- **Tragedy** - Many people just quit functioning because their families died or were killed...sometimes recently...other times 15 years ago...other times 30 years ago.



Domestic violence is often a primary cause of homelessness among women and their children. Research has shown that housing instability and a lack of safe and affordable housing options increase the risks of homelessness for women experiencing domestic violence. Victims often have little access to money and weak support systems to rely on if and when they flee the relationship. Because of this, many victims of domestic violence are faced with the difficult decision to stay with their abusers or become homeless when they flee.

Stephanie Guzman
Homeless Prevention Coordinator
East Texas Crisis Center

Employment



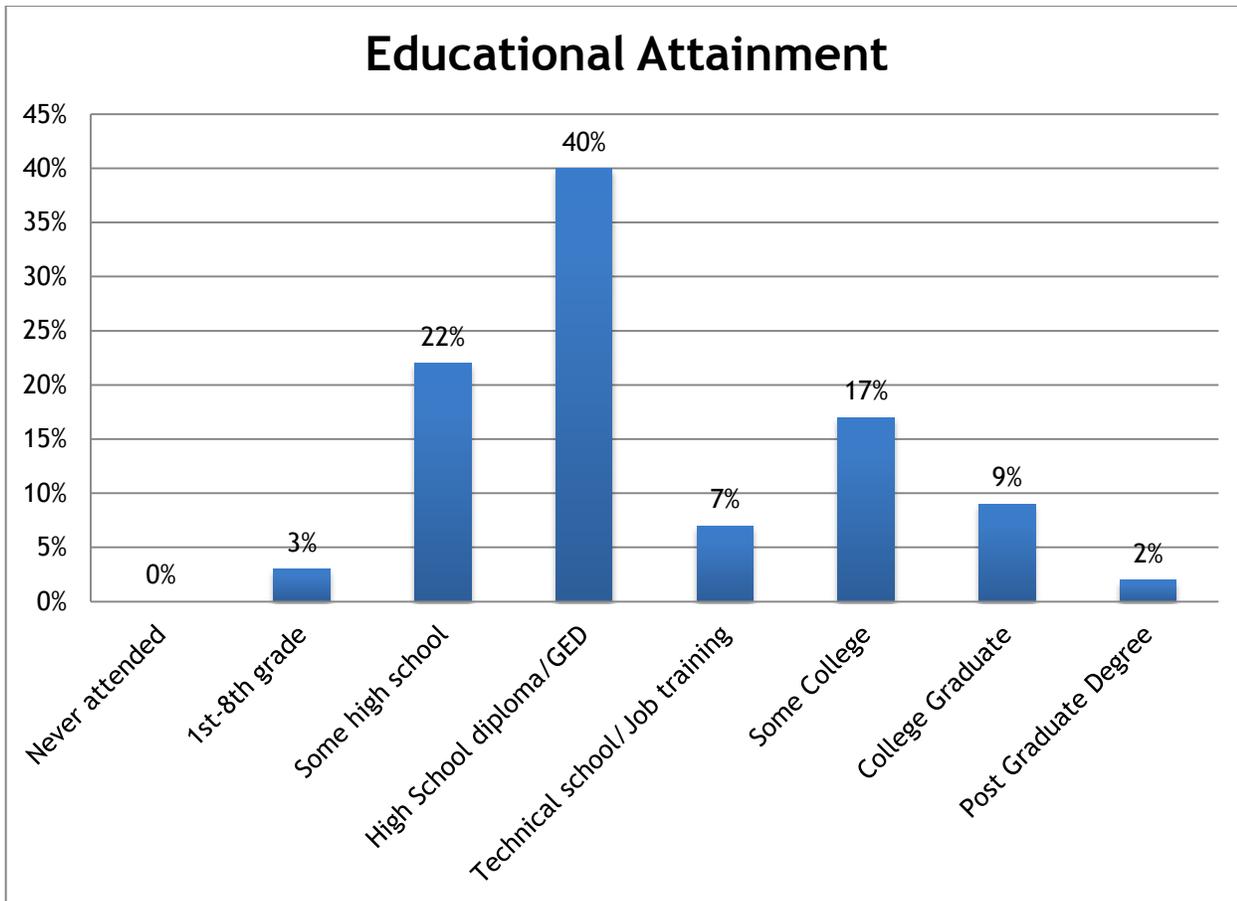
In this study, 80.7% of respondents indicated they were able to work; however only 36% have some form of employment, with only 16% employed fulltime.

Those that work, average 32 hours per week, and their median monthly income is \$710. Median length of unemployment is 3 months.

Unemployment is the number one reason for homelessness. Historically, lack of transportation is the top reason for unemployment.

The increase in low-wage work and the number of working poor families has been accompanied by another disappointing trend. Working families have no benefits such as sick leave, vacation time, and health insurance. Without these benefits, a day of work missed is a day without pay. Many working poor parents are not paid when they take time off to care for a sick child, when they attend a funeral or when they are hospitalized. There are no funds available to sustain families during periods of unemployment, which can be frequent with the seasonal or temporary nature of many jobs of the working poor.

Education



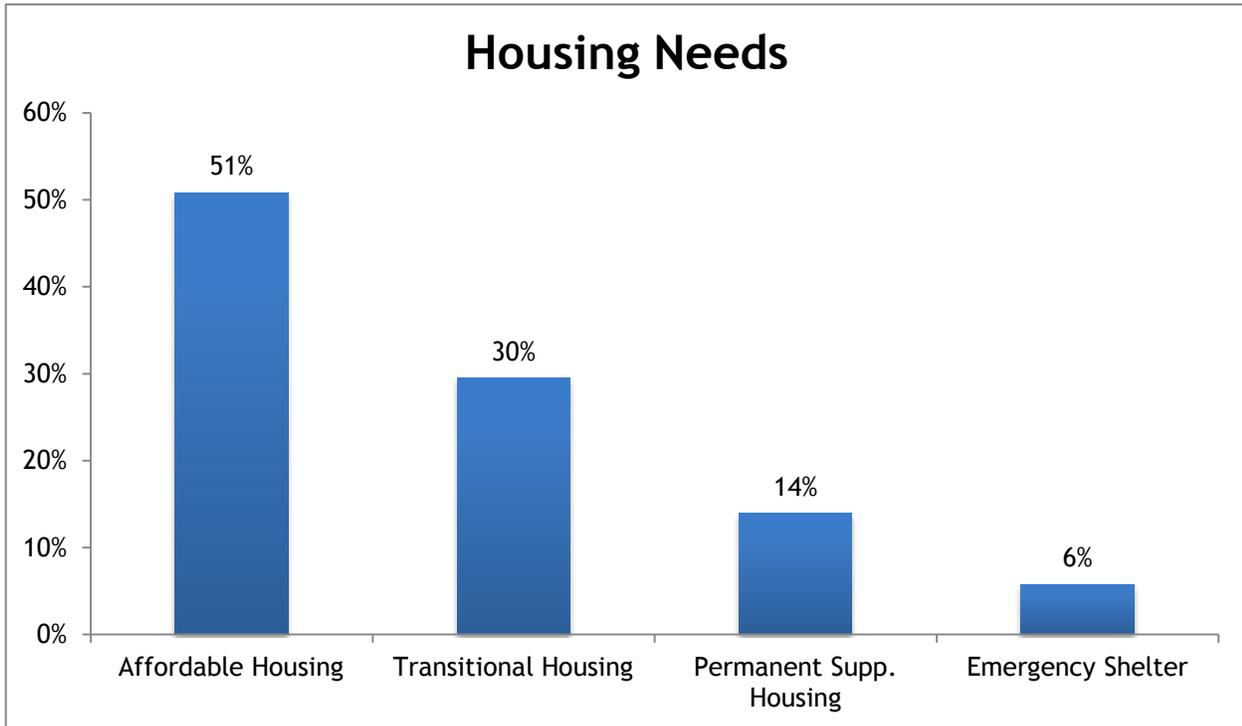
75% of respondents report attaining a high school diploma or higher degree.
25% did not graduate from high school.

Education equates to earnings. People with a solid basic education and literacy skills work and earn more than individuals without those skills. Low educational attainment can lead to unemployment; unemployment is the number one reason for homelessness.

A lack of education limits access to living-wage jobs. Research has shown the lack of a high school diploma to be associated with homelessness for individuals and families. When people lack income to meet all of their needs, they are forced to choose between housing, utilities, transportation, childcare, healthcare, and food. The need for an educated workforce has never been greater. The majority of new jobs that will be created by 2014 will require some postsecondary education. In 1970, only 26 percent of middle-class workers had any education beyond high school. Today, nearly 60 percent of all jobs in the U.S. economy require completion of a certificate or college degree.

Fred Peters
Director - Public Affairs and Grant Development
Tyler Junior College

Housing Needed



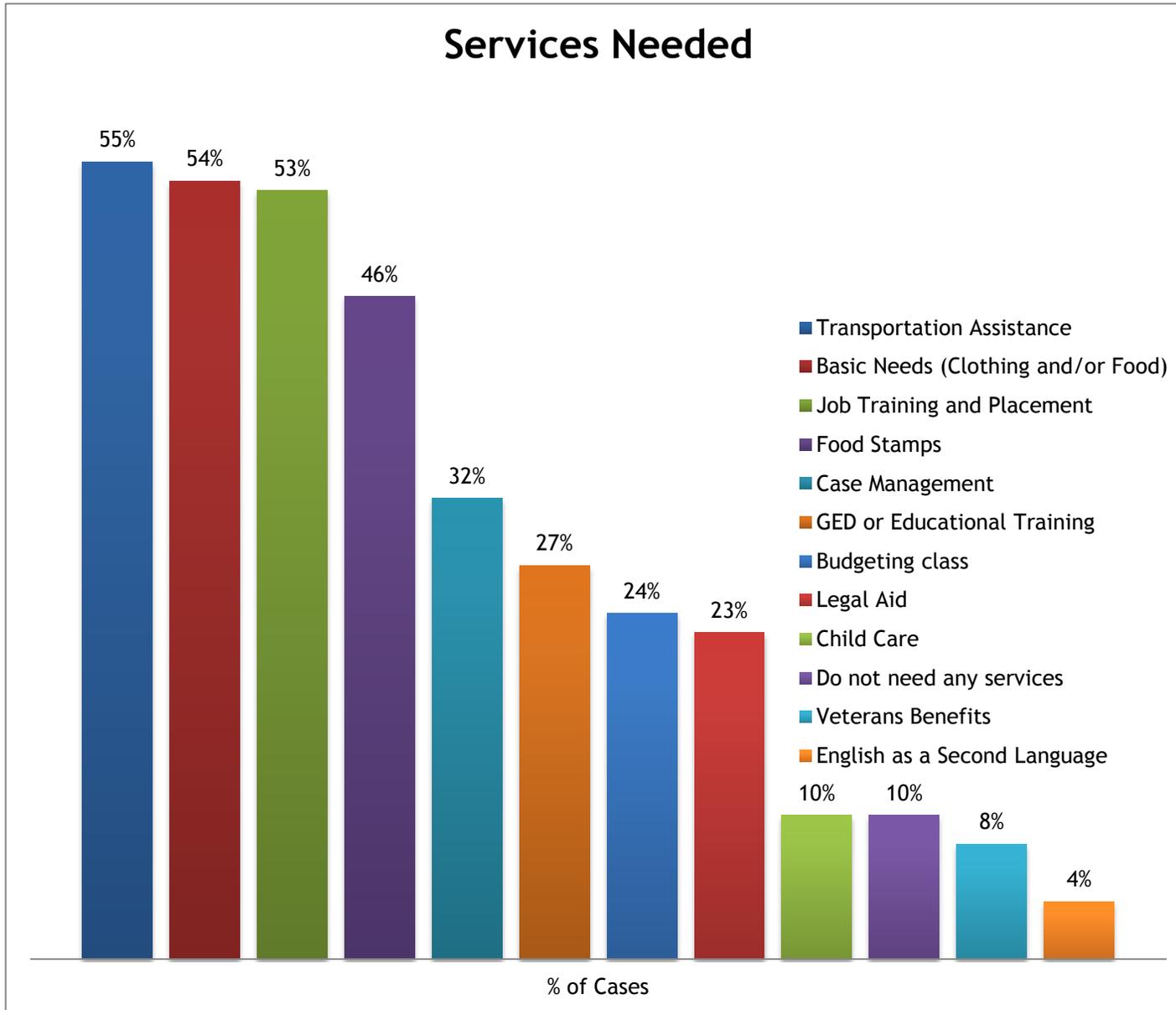
Housing Affordability

According to the National Low Income Housing Coalition 2013 Out of Reach report, in Tyler and Smith County, the Fair Market Rent (FMR) for a two-bedroom apartment is \$789. In order to afford this level of rent and utilities - without paying more than 30% of income on housing - a household must earn \$2,630 monthly or \$31,560 annually. Assuming a 40-hour work week, 52 weeks per year, this level of income translates into a Housing Wage of \$15.17/hour.



In Texas, a minimum wage worker earns an hourly wage of \$7.25. In order to afford the FMR for a two-bedroom apartment, a minimum wage earner must work 84 hours per week, 52 weeks per year. Or a household must include 2.1 minimum wage earners working 40 hours per week year-round in order to make the two-bedroom FMR affordable.^v

Services Needed

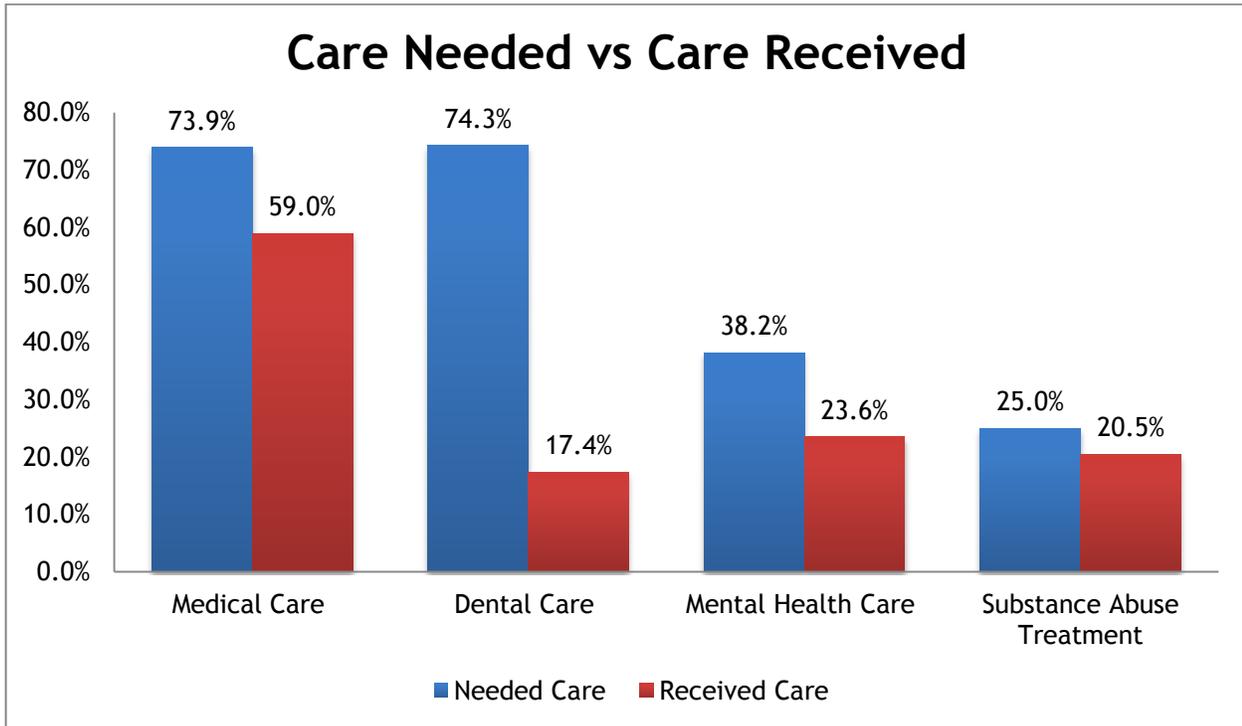


Although housing is a priority of all persons participating in our survey, the needs for transportation, job training and placement, and case management as listed in the top five. These align with the top reasons for becoming homeless. Basic needs for clothing and food are also in the top five. Agencies believe this is an issue of accessibility. Those experiencing homelessness are very aware of what would help them get out and stay out of homelessness.

In my experience as the Area Mobility Manager for Tyler/Smith County, the most significant unmet transportation needs include the lack of late night fixed route bus service and seamless services between rural and urban settings.

Kristy Swan Range
Tyler / Smith County Area Mobility
Manager

Unmet Clinical Care



When asked about insurance only 24% have insurance, which most Texans can barely afford. Still, 59% of respondents who required medical care went to the emergency room.

People with Complex Health Needs

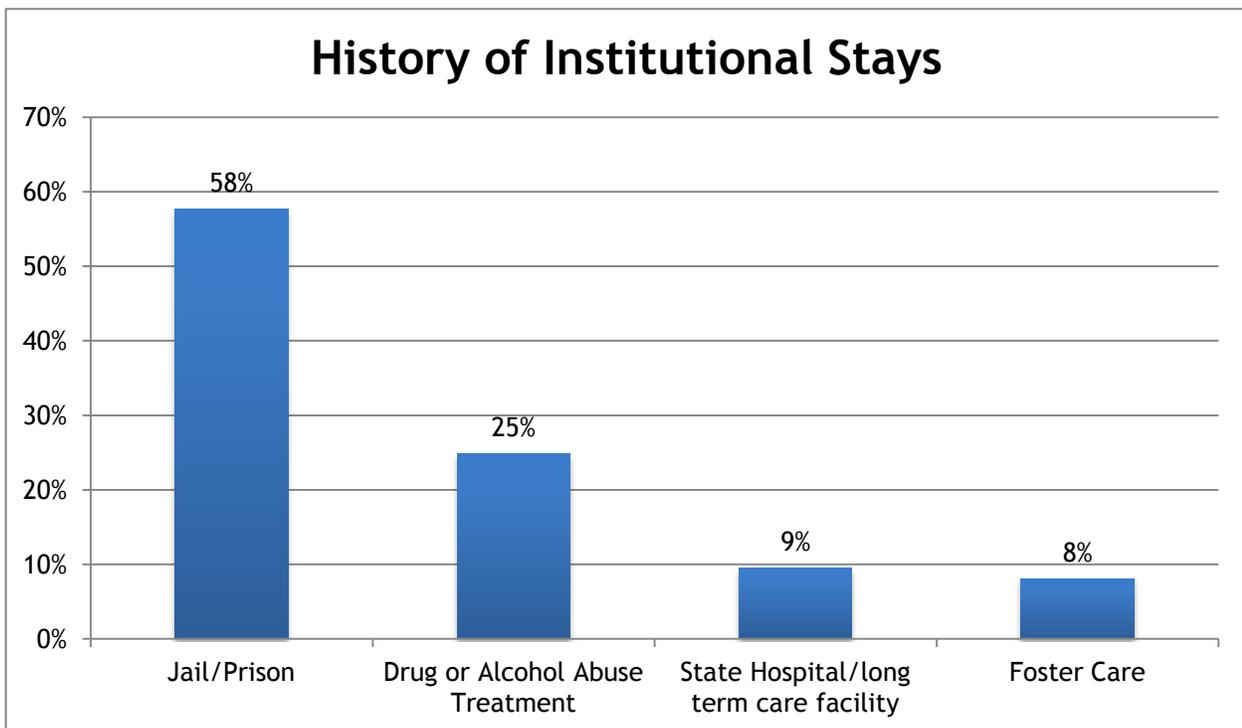
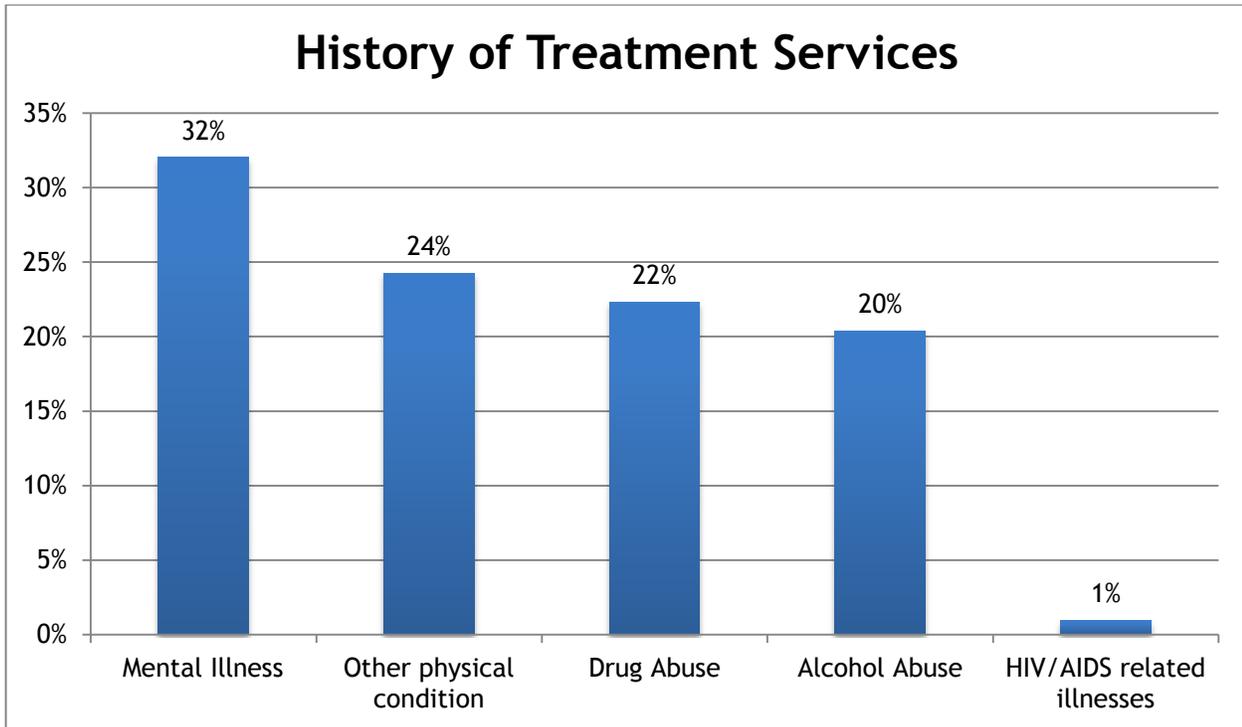
According to the Corporation for Supportive Housing (CSH), across the country, many hospital emergency departments are treating individuals who visit hospitals multiple times a year, often because of complex physical, mental, and social needs. These frequent users often experience chronic illness, mental health, and substance abuse disorders and homelessness, all of which can contribute to frequent emergency department visits. Emergency departments are a community resource and are the only health care resource that by law must serve everyone—but they also provide the most expensive health services in our communities. Frequent users' hospital visits can account for disproportionate costs and time for emergency departments, contribute to emergency department overcrowding, and drain state and county health care resources.

Supportive housing can be used to address the needs of the health systems users by replacing a costly and ineffective cycle with ongoing, coordinated and multi-disciplinary care provided in more appropriate settings.

We must meet the person where he or she is and begin to assist in offering options for improvement.

*Waymon Stewart
Andrews Center Behavioral Healthcare
System
Chief Executive Officer*

History of Treatment Services and Institutional Stays



People Involved in Criminal Justice

According to the Corporation for Supportive housing, every year, over 650,000 people are released from prisons and more than 7 million individuals are released from jails in the United States. Many persons with mental health and substance use issues cycle between homelessness and incarceration for months or years at great public expense and with tragic human outcomes. Across the country:

- 26% of people in jail report that they were homeless in the year prior to incarceration.
- At least 16% of people in jail and prison suffer from mental illness.
- 80% of people in jail and prison have a history of substance use.
- Individuals who do not have housing are seven times more likely to violate parole.

They cycle in and out of incarceration, homeless shelters, psychiatric hospitals, detox and drug treatment programs, and other emergency service systems at immense public expense and with bad outcomes.

Experts observe that, of all the issues facing these individuals, none is more immediate – or arguably more important – than the need to secure housing. Without access to safe and affordable housing, people re-entering the community have little or no chance at success; and without housing the success of other supports like employment services, mentoring, and substance abuse counseling is extremely limited.

Supportive housing has been documented to reduce criminal justice involvement for homeless people with severe mental illnesses, reducing jail and prison incarceration rates.

Poverty

The availability of resources can make a major difference between being at risk and becoming chronically homeless. Employment, insurance, and social service

programs all contribute to keeping people stably housed and off the streets. The unifying condition for virtually all of Smith County’s homeless population is extreme poverty. Poverty is more than a lack of funds; it is the mental and physical state of impoverishment. Growing up in poverty has been shown to create more cases of poverty through a process called “learned helplessness.” Having a support system is imperative in helping someone overcome poverty. According to the US Census Bureau, 18.5% of Texans live at or under the poverty level. According to the US Department of Health and Human Services a family of four would have to make \$1,963 a month to be above the threshold.

2013 Poverty Guidelines for the 48 Contiguous States and the District of Columbia	
Persons in family/household	Poverty guideline
1	\$ 11,490
2	\$ 15,510
3	\$ 19,530
4	\$ 23,550
5	\$ 27,570
6	\$ 31,590
7	\$ 35,610
8	\$ 39,630
For families/households with more than 8 persons, add \$4,020 for each additional person.	

Department of Health and Human Services

Responding to the needs

What is a Continuum of Care?

Updated January 2010- National Alliance to End Homelessness

A Continuum of Care (CoC) is a regional or local planning body that coordinates housing and services funding for homeless families and individuals. In 2007, 461 CoCs submitted application for federal homeless assistance funds in all 50 states, plus DC, Puerto Rico, and Guam. CoCs represent communities of all kinds, including major cities, suburbs and rural areas.

In 1995, the US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) began to require communities to submit a single application for McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Grants in order to streamline the funding application process, encourage coordination of housing and service providers on a local level, and promote the development of Continuums of Care (CoCs). By requiring communities to submit a single application, HUD hoped to encourage a more structural and strategic approach to both housing and providing services to homeless people. A CoC would provide this more strategic system by providing homeless people with housing and services appropriate to their range of needs.

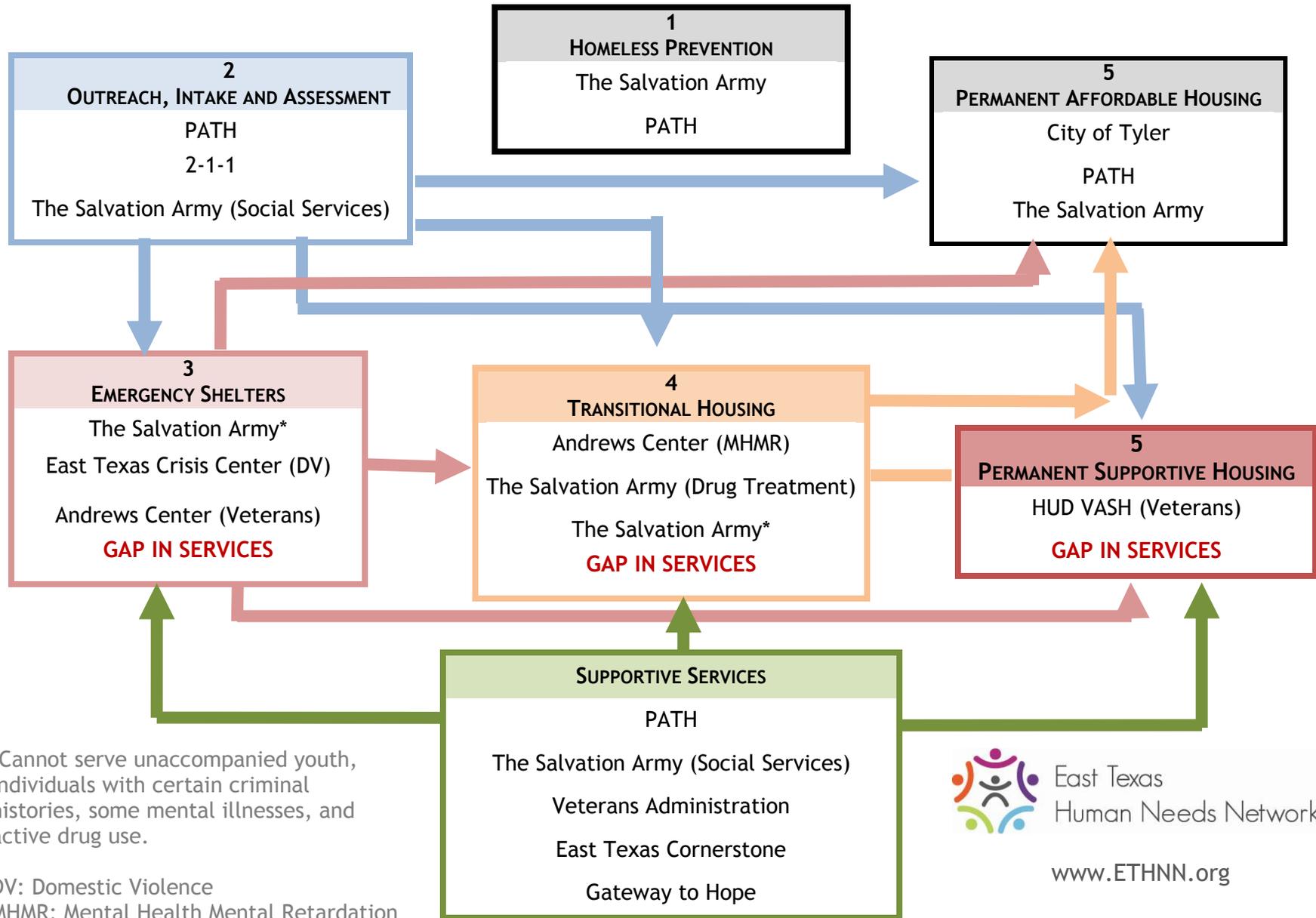
According to HUD, a CoC is “a community plan to organize and deliver housing and services to meet the specific needs of people who are homeless as they move to stable housing and maximize self-sufficiency. It includes action steps to end homelessness and prevent a return to homelessness.” HUD identifies four necessary parts of a continuum:

- Outreach, intake, and assessment in order to identify service and housing needs and provide a link to the appropriate level of both;
- Emergency shelter to provide an immediate and safe alternative to sleeping on the streets, especially for homeless families with children;
- Transitional housing with supportive services to allow for the development of skills that will be needed once permanently housed; and
- Permanent and permanent supportive housing to provide individuals and families with an affordable place to live with services if needed.

CoCs are tasked to can track and manage the homeless community in their area. One of most important activities entrusted to CoCs is the biannual count of the homeless population and an annual enumeration of emergency systems, transitional housing units, and beds that make up the homeless assistance systems. These counts provide an overview of the state of homelessness in a CoC, and offer the information necessary to redirect services, funding, and resources as necessary. The CoC also manages these services, offering both prevention strategies and homeless assistance programs to assist those at-risk of or experiencing homelessness.

TYLER / SMITH COUNTY - CONTINUUM OF CARE FLOW OF SERVICES

The diagram shows the flow of services for those experiencing homelessness or at risk of homelessness. The tables show social services agencies addressing stages of homelessness.



Recommendations

National, State, and Local Plan

The East Texas Human Needs Network plan follows the models established by the Federal Strategic Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness and the Texas Interagency Council for the Homeless Annual Report and Pathways Home Addendum.

The plan presents strategies building upon the lesson that mainstream housing, health, education, and human service programs must be fully engaged and coordinated to prevent and end homelessness, including:

- **Increasing leadership, collaboration, and civic engagement**, with a focus on providing and promoting collaborative leadership at all levels of government and across all sectors, and strengthening the capacity of public and private organizations by increasing knowledge about collaboration and successful interventions to prevent and end homelessness.
- **Increasing access to stable and affordable housing**, by providing affordable housing and permanent supportive housing.
- **Increasing economic security**, by expanding opportunities for meaningful and sustainable employment and improving access to mainstream programs and services to reduce financial vulnerability to homelessness.
- **Improving health and stability**, by linking health care with homeless assistance programs and housing, advancing stability for youth aging out of systems such as foster care and juvenile justice, and improving discharge planning for people who have frequent contact with hospitals and criminal justice systems.
- **Retooling the homeless response system**, by transforming homeless services to crisis response systems that prevent homelessness and rapidly return people who experience homelessness to stable housing.

ⁱ Author, *Homeless Children: America's New Outcasts* (Newton, MA: National Center on Family Homelessness, 1999).

ⁱⁱ *Ibid.*

ⁱⁱⁱ Dr. Joy Rogers of the Loyola University Department of Education, *Education Report of Rule 706 Expert Panel presented in B.H. v. Johnson*, 715 F. Supp. 1387 (N.D. Ill. 1989), 1991.

^{iv} National Coalition for Homeless Veterans

^v National Low Income Housing Coalition