

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report is a product of a study, administered by Pacific Policy and Research Institute, conducted in Marion and Polk counties. The purpose of this report is to provide an overview of the results of the homelessness research conducted in January 2007.

A research team, including more than 50 community members who completed 12 hours of intensive and comprehensive training, collected data from people without a permanent place to live in designated areas throughout Marion and Polk counties. These designated areas included parks, camps, and shelters, community-service sites, under bridges, streets, and other similar areas. Research team members, using a standardized interview schedule, collected data from 360 willing participants.

Another focal point was the Marion County Jail where more than 500 prisoners (about 85% of all prisoners) voluntarily participated in a survey that focused on issues related to homelessness. The Polk County Jail did not provide access to administer the survey.

The survey instrument and the interview schedule include many quantifiable variables germane to homelessness. The categories of variables include:

- Demographics
- Education
- Employment
- Veteran status
- Residency
- Jail and Prison History
- Substance Abuse
- Mental Health
- Medical Concerns
- Disability Concerns
- Risk of HIV/AIDS and Hepatitis C
- Respondent Perceptions and Recommendations

Starting Point:

This research marks the starting point for launching the Ten Year Plan to End Homelessness in Marion and Polk counties. Data collected from this study provide crucial information about the breadth and depth of the problem of homelessness confronting communities in Marion and Polk counties. The purpose of this report is to establish a starting point for the Ten Year Plan, and to develop viable tools for program implementation, and accommodate variable measurement and program evaluation.

Homeless Totals

Totals for the homeless count conducted on January 30, 2007 include one-night shelter counts, count reports from five school district sites, DHS site count surveys, street counts, street surveys, and data collected from the Marion County Jail. The jail counts required the development of two count formulas. The first formula includes only participating prisoners at the Marion County Jail who had no permanent housing before their arrest. The total count using formula 1 is 1,921. The second count formula includes only participating prisoners who have no permanent housing following their release. The total count using formula 2 is 2,006. The total chronic homeless count includes only those individuals who have been without a permanent place to live for more than one year, indicate they have a disability, and are alone. The number of chronic homeless persons identified on January 30, 2007 is 89, which includes 49 identified in the street interviews, 8 in the shelter interviews, and 32 from the one-night shelter counts.¹

Demographics:

Street interviews resulted in data collected from 288 males, 67 females, and five individuals described as trans-gender persons. Ages, collapsed into four groups (1) Under 21 years of age, (2) 21-35 years of age, (3) 36-50 years of age, and (4) Over 50 years of age, indicate that over 41% were in the 36-50 years age group, followed by nearly 37% who were 21-35 years of age, and 11.11% under 21 years of age. Participants who were over 50 years of age account for 10.56% of the participants. Over 40% of all participants graduated from high school and/or had some college education. Over 27% of the participants are veterans. Six of the homeless veterans were women.

Characteristics:

Participants who have been homeless for more than 12 months total 100 (27.78%). Over 70% of all participants indicate they have a place to sleep, and over 64% said they have been in the same location from 1 day to 3 months. Over 68% of the participants say they have stayed in a shelter, and over 52 percent indicated their stay in a shelter lasted 28 days or less. Most participants stayed in a local shelter – just over 5% report staying in a shelter outside of Oregon. Over 85% of participants indicate they eat regularly, and over 87% define eating regularly as eating 2 times or less per day. Over 28% of the participants indicate their source of money/income comes from part time work, followed by panhandling (25.28%) and scavenging (20.00%). When asked about their plans for tomorrow, over 63% indicated they had no plans or did not know what their plans were, 15.56% said survive, and 20.83% indicated their plans included looking for work. Over 58% of all respondents indicated they were looking for work. More than 84% of the

¹ The Salem Police Department launched a sweep of homeless people throughout much of the city that resulted in extensive movements of homeless people removed from areas where they slept and congregated.

participants said they were alone. When asked about the primary cause of being homeless 23.61% said mental health issues, 22.78% said their jail and prison records, and over 15% said they had no other options. When asked about the most difficult aspect of being homeless 23.89% said dealing with people and 23.61% indicated police harassment. Over 21% said that finding a safe place to sleep was the most difficult part of being homeless. When asked what is necessary to improve their current situation, over 35% said having a place to live, nearly 30% said job or work opportunities, and almost 22% said nothing will ever be done (indicating the prevalence of hopelessness as the third most frequent response).

Eviction and Homelessness:

Eviction inquiries examined whether or not eviction resulted in homelessness status, and finally, whether any of those evictions were a result of their inability to pay utility bills. Nearly 56% (201) of the participants experienced eviction from a home. Over 98% (198) of those participants who experienced eviction said that eviction resulted in becoming homelessness. Over 47% (94) of those participants who became homeless because of their eviction said the eviction was due, in part, to their inability to pay their utility bills.

Medical Health and Disabilities:

Several questions related to health and disability. The purpose for asking these questions was to determine how many participants had health problems, disabilities, how many felt they were at risk for HIV/AIDS and/or Hepatitis C, and when was the last time they saw a doctor. Over 44% indicated they felt they were at risk for HIV/AIDS and/or Hepatitis C. Over 62% said they had medical problems, and more than 54% said they had concerns about disabilities. Nearly 27% had seen a doctor during the past year, over 40% saw a doctor during the past 1-2 years, and more than 16% saw a doctor during the past 3-5 years.

Discrimination, Violence, and Homelessness:

Participants were asked about discrimination they had experienced due to being homeless, and whether they had ever experienced violence during their homeless status. Over 97% indicated they had experienced discrimination because they were homeless. Almost 62% said they had experienced violence during the time they had been homeless.

Jail and Prison Experience:

Participants were asked about their jail and prison experience. These were not probing questions but rather exploratory questions to determine if the participant had ever been in jail or in prison. Over 74% of the participants said they had been in jail, and 24.17% said they had been in prison.

Shelter Interviews - January 30, 2007: Shelter interviews resulted in data collected from 20 males and 14 females. Ages of the respondents were collapsed into four groups (1) Under 21 years of age, (2) 21-35 years of age, (3) 36-50 years of age, and (4) Over 50 years of age. Over 61% of all participants report graduating from high school and/or some college education. Over 26% of the participants are veterans.

Marion County Jail Survey January 30, 2007:

All prisoners at the Marion County Jail had the opportunity to participate in the homeless survey conducted on January 30, 2007, and 508 prisoners completed the survey instrument. Over 40% indicated they did not have a permanent place to live before their arrest, and nearly 57% said they would not have a permanent place to live after their release from jail. Over 48% said they did not have a job prior to their arrest, and more than 75% said they would not have a job to go to following their release from jail. Nearly one-half of the prisoners (48.23%) said they did not have adequate hygiene supplies and basic clothing upon their release from jail.