

**Whatcom County
2006**

Point-in-Time Count of Homeless Persons

January 27th, 2006



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To the Whatcom County Housing Advisory Committee
Whatcom County Health Department Human Services Division
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“To be homeless literally means that you have no home to live in, that you are deprived of your sense of place and privacy, your sense of belonging – all essential elements of identity, of self-worth.” *New England Journal of Public Policy*

Introduction

Public perceptions of the homeless are often based on the most visible individuals of the homeless population. It's likely the image of sidewalk panhandlers, indigents sleeping in a park, or sign-holders at freeway ramps shape the public's overall perception of the homeless. The Point-in-Time Homeless Count method gathers data that provides a more complete picture. This information in turn can be used to help change public perceptions and to inform policy makers of the deeper issues contributing to the homelessness problem.

In fact, of the 1255 individuals counted in Whatcom County's 2006 Point-in-Time Count, 35% were under the age 18. If the total is adjusted to include the 178 children who are temporarily living with others* and whose numbers were not included in the count, the percentage in 2006 matches that of 2005 at about 40%.

Often, a homeless child lives with one parent, a relative or a friend. They may be sleeping in a car, staying in a camper at a state park, or temporarily living in someone else's house. They may catch a school bus from a motel where they are temporarily living. After their family flees domestic violence, they may be sheltered in transitional housing or living in an emergency shelter. In truth, a youth on the street may live there rather than in an unstable or violent family home.

In Whatcom County and across the nation, an increasing number of families are living on the margin. Many and not just those at the lowest

* The count this year and last year collected information on those temporarily living with others. However, it's important to note that the 2005 count total of 839 included those living temporarily with others and the 2006 count total of 1255 did not. The adjustment was made this year since the federal definition of homeless does not include those temporarily living with others. The count totals for each year cannot be compared without taking this into account.

For the purposes of making a raw comparison between last year's total counted to this year's total counted, one can adjust the 2005 total of 839 by subtracting the 29 identified as temporarily living with others for a total of 810 as compared to the 2006 count total of 1255. All other comparisons in this report use the official totals of 839 and 1255.

"The P-I found the reasons people are locked into the ranks of the working poor are diverse and complex. Personal choices and poor planning play roles. So do bad timing, rotten luck and the high cost of living here.

One in eight families in this region has two adults working full time but still qualifies as poor. Many more, however, are one misstep from joining their ranks.

"It takes just one lost job, a medical crisis, a few missed payments, and people lose their grip on the lowest rung of the ladder to the middle class."
Seattle Post Intelligencer, Feb. 16, 2006

"The lack of affordable housing is considered the leading cause of homelessness by city officials."
US Council of Mayors December 2005

economic strata could be at risk. The housing boom has left many with fewer affordable housing options. An economic boom doesn't pull up the ranks of the working poor; but in an economic downturn, they are the first to feel it. In addition, a low-paying job that doesn't cover the basic living expenses, an uncertain job market, rising energy costs nibbling away at family budgets, or an illness uncovered by insurance or a lack of health insurance altogether have squeezed people's capacity to make it through a financial emergency. Couple this current reality with a lack savings for an emergency and even economically stable families or individuals can be at significant financial risk.

The impact of alcohol and drug abuse as a significant contributor to homelessness is well-documented. The addiction affects the entire household. This societal problem has a lasting impact on a significant number of our next generation and our children's children. In our county, successful clean and sober houses, chemical dependency programs, and other facilities provide a safe haven while people tackle their dependency on drugs or alcohol and receive the support they need to stay clean.

Any one thing can lead to homelessness, but half of the homeless counted in Whatcom County listed more than one reason they became homeless. The most common contributors were mental illness, alcohol or drug use, inability to pay rent/mortgage, job loss, domestic violence and family break-up.

At times, some of the individuals in jail or under the jurisdiction of the Department of Corrections were homeless when they went in or they will be homeless when they get out. The Whatcom County Jail houses 29 homeless individuals and 43 more are under the purview of the Department of Corrections. At 72 individuals, that's 5% of the total homeless counted. These people often exhibit mental health and/or abuse profiles that put them at higher risk for committing crimes that will get

them incarcerated. Once they get out, those with a record find it harder to secure a place to live or a job. Policy planning for homeless offenders and the difficulties of housing them is a sticky community issue. The likelihood that they remain trapped in this at-risk population is high.

Point-in-Time Count of Homeless Persons 2006

why do a Point-in-Time Count?

To be eligible for federal grants that bring approximately 1.5 million dollars into the Bellingham/Whatcom County Continuum of Care system, jurisdictions must complete a Point-in-Time count of homeless persons on a biennial basis. One of the benefits to the community, in addition to helping City and County leaders see a clearer profile of our homeless population, is that it increases public awareness and serves as a catalyst for problem solving.

2006 marks a significant increase in the importance of the Point-in-Time count. The information and count data gathered becomes a baseline by which Whatcom County will measure its success in reducing homelessness by 2010. In other words, it's a baseline by which our progress will be judged. The stakes are higher, the need for planning and cooperation among agencies more essential, and the connection of funding to results even more apparent. It's simply a higher profile issue – more than ever before. Our County has outlined its goal to significantly reduce homelessness by 2015.



2163 The Homelessness Housing and Assistance Act

The 2005 Washington State Legislature passed Engrossed Second Substitute House Bill 2163 or ESSHB 2163 an ACT Relating to preventing and ending homelessness in the State of Washington.

The county plan is required to include a minimum goal of reducing homelessness by 50% by July 1, 2015.

To be homeless is to lack a fixed, regular, nighttime residence

as defined by HUD

what does it mean to be "homeless"?

As defined by the federal Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), to be **homeless** is to lack a fixed, regular, nighttime residence. Furthermore, a person is considered homeless if they:

- don't have a decent and safe shelter or funds to purchase a place to stay;
- are camping in a tent on their own property; or
- are receiving monetary help to stay in housing and would otherwise be homeless.
- are in jail and didn't have a permanent address upon incarceration.

This year's count of 1255 individuals does NOT include the 'couch surfing' or 'doubled-up' population in the final number of 1255. However, that does not diminish the fact that those who are living temporarily with others are a primary at-risk population. The data showed that 360 people are living this way in Whatcom County or which more than half are children.

"One factor contributing to the invisibility of the working poor in this region is that the 'relative 'haves' don't tend to interact with the relative 'have-lesser,' " said Steve Williamson of the King County Labor Council."
Seattle Post Intelligencer

People are considered **chronically homeless** if they have been living on the streets, or have been in and out of shelters for more than one year. "On the streets" means living in cars, tents, in abandoned buildings and other places not meant for human habitation. The chronically homeless can be difficult to serve and to count, and may have difficulty accessing or remaining in assistance programs. They are more likely to avoid assistance or contact with mainstream society altogether. Street outreach volunteers and workers meet the homeless near their camps, bring them sack lunches, council them or just listen. They work to provide meaningful contact with society and hope to help them get to a more stable place in life.



participation in the count

104 organizations in Bellingham, Ferndale, Sumas, Blaine, Deming, Kendall, Everson, and within the Nooksack and Lummi Nations were invited to participate in the count. Of these, 52 organizations were able to participate, resulting in over 1000 completed surveys.

participating organizations

Food Banks/Meal Programs

- BC? Meal Program
- Bellingham Food Bank
- Ferndale Food Bank
- Maple Alley Inn
- Soups On
- Faith Lutheran Church - CAST

School Districts

- Bellingham School District
- Blaine School District
- Mt. Baker School District
- Meridian School District
- Nooksack School District
- Ferndale School District
- Lynden School District

Law Enforcement

- Bellingham Police Dept.
- Blaine Police Dept.
- Department of Corrections
- Ferndale Police Dept.

- Nooksack Tribal Police
- Sumas Police Dept.
- Whatcom County Jail
- Whatcom County Sheriff

Housing and Service Providers

- Bellingham Veterans Center
- Brigid Collins House
- Christ the King Church
- Disabled Veterans
- DSHS – Community Services Org.
- Evergreen Aids Foundation
- Hope House
- Lake Whatcom Treatment Center
- Lighthouse Mission/AGAPE
- Lummi Victims of Crime
- Lummi Indian Business Council
- Lydia Place
- New Way Ministries
- Northwest Youth Services
- Nooksack Housing

- Nooksack Social Services
- Opportunity Council/Dorothy Place
- Old Town Christian Ministries
- Rainbow Center
- Salvation Army
- Sean Humphrey House
- SeaMar
- Stepping Stones Clean and Sober
- St. Joseph's Hospital Social Services
- St. Joseph's Hospital Behavioral Services
- Sun Community/Gladstone
- Westcoast Counseling
- Whatcom Counseling & Psychiatric Clinic
- Whatcom County Social Detox
- YWCA Transitional Housing Program

Street Outreach workers

- Salt on the Street, Westcoast Counseling and Hope House



why use the point-in-time count method?

With any method, it is difficult to count the homeless – especially the transient population or those living in camps or on the streets. We use a point-in-time count method because it is relatively easy for local jurisdictions to administer and the results provide snapshot-in-time data which can be used in planning purposes. The Washington state point-in-time count conducted each year in late January provides statewide data and a picture of homelessness that can be used over time to identify potential trends and target coordinated planning efforts to reduce homelessness.

it's the best tool we've got, but...

Not every homeless person gets counted using the point-in-time method or any method. Why?

- A thorough count relies solely on local organizations and agencies counting the individuals they serve. In addition, some agencies may not participate each year or they may participate, but not count anyone.
- The unsheltered or intermittently homeless may not get counted; they are more difficult to find or identify and may not have been accessing services on the day(s) of the count.

Not all of the information gathered can ever be complete.

- The only **required** information on the statewide standardized form is the individual's first and last initials, age and gender -- an individual cannot be counted unless birth year and gender is provided.
- Count forms may not be completed fully, as individuals are not required to include information they don't wish to reveal. While some information better than no information, it is inherently incomplete. This incomplete picture is inherent to any count method.

Improvements are made to the count methodology each year.

Point in Time Homeless Count Form

- One of the 2006 count goals was to improve the overall completeness of more forms. This year 70% of the forms compared to 50% last year were more completely filled out and contained additional information other than name initials, age and gender.
- Another 2006 goal was to cast a wider net throughout the county by counting more street homeless and increasing the number of countywide agencies participating. Eight additional agencies participated this year. The Pizza Feed resulted in counting 111 more people than last year – most of them adults and nearly 40% of them street homeless.

interpreting the data

The established data input system used in this count eliminates duplication of individuals in count results.

It's critical that the use of percentages in this report be understood.

Percentages have been included in order to provide additional context to the raw numbers, and they allow for somewhat accurate comparisons year to year and within categories of information.

- It's important to note that only the percentages offered for gender and age are exact since every form must include that information.
- In all other cases, percentages actually represent the **minimum** number of people or households experiencing that situation because not every question on the form is responded to 100% of the time. All other percentages are based on the actual number of responses recorded.
- Individual data is collected specific to each person on the upper portion of the form and includes individual family member age and gender plus their individual disabilities.
- Household data is collected on the lower half of the form which applies to all of the members of the household as listed on the

form and includes veteran's status, where the household stayed the previous night, the reasons for the household's homelessness, the duration of their homelessness, or their sources of income. 922 households were counted in 2006. A lone individual is a household and a group of related people listed on the same form are a household.

The 2006 Homeless Count cast a wider net and reached deeper into the community. The result was we counted more homeless people. Does this mean we have more homeless?

Not entirely.

can previous homeless counts be compared?

Each year the count casts a wider net and reaches deeper into the community. The result was we counted more homeless people. Does this mean we have more homeless? Not entirely. Here's why.

Whatcom County has just two consecutive years (2005 and 2006) in which the count has been done in largely the same way with the same form. In order to establish reliable data and to determine potential trends, Point-in-Time counts need to be duplicated over several years using the same process and a consistent form year after year while including the same service providers over time.

The counts of 2005 and 2006 were able to build upon past year counts and used different methodology, different count forms, and a more complete list of participants and better outreach to difficult-to-count populations. These factors are likely to result in a greater number of homeless counted due in large part to improvements every year in the scope of the count. It would take several years of counts to determine possible trend lines pointing to increases in our homeless populations.

However, in an attempt to put the 2005 and the 2006 counts in perspective, percentage comparisons have been drawn to reveal variances between the two years. The percentage comparisons are one way to extract additional meaning from the raw number comparisons.

variance between the 2005 and the 2006 count

To put the 2006 homeless count total into context, one must account for the impact of the increase in agencies participating in the 2006 count and the success of the Pizza Feed. Because of these impacts, it is inaccurate to state that there are over 400 more homeless or that there has been a 30% increase in homeless people in Whatcom County compared to last year.

What's more likely is that we did a better count of the homeless we have in Whatcom County.

- The Rainbow Center counted 111 more people this year than last year in response to the Pizza Feed event.
- In addition, the 2006 count included data from nine additional agencies that counted 193 individuals. These individuals were being served this year by agencies that did not participate in the count last year but did have clients that could have been unreported in the 2005 total. One agency of the nine - Stepping Stones Clean and Sober Housing – was a new participant and this organization counted 48 individuals some of which might not have been counted last year.

what changes in methodology

The 2006 Count had a 52 agencies/organizations participating and 1255 counted. The 2005 Count had 43 agencies/organizations participating and 839 counted. Much of the difference between the numbers counted in 2006 vs. 2005 can be attributed to this 20% increase in participating agencies and the following factors.

do a better count of street homeless

Counting street homeless and those in outlying camps is difficult especially with the rural and wooded pockets around our county. Significant progress was made in 2006 in counting this population in locations around the county – in camps, at soup kitchens and meal programs, at the mall, and on the streets. Outreach organizations continue to be reluctant to participate in the count due to concerns of potentially

jeopardizing the trust of street homeless by having them fill out a form. This year some individuals agreed to participate in the count as street outreach workers. This made a huge difference.

attract homeless to a meal where they can be counted

A significant change in count methodology was made in 2006 by holding a Pizza Feed for the homeless at the Rainbow Center. This event's goal was to attract homeless people to a central location so they could be counted. The Pizza Feed attracted and fed 200+ individuals – many of whom might not have been counted through other outreach methods. Of those who attended, 133 forms were collected that weren't duplicated by another agency. This event definitely increased the 2006 total count numbers and accessed more difficult to count street homeless. AS a result of the pizza feed, the Rainbow Center counted 111 more individuals in 2006 than it did in 2005 (22 individuals in 2005 and 133 in 2006).



increase agency/organization participation

The 2006 Count increased the number of participants from 43 to 50. These participating agencies/organizations counted 193 additional individuals -- 92% of which were adults. Some organizations agreed to participate in the count, but they did not encounter any individuals this year: CAST, Hope House, Christ the King Church, and Salt on the Street. CAST as well as Salt on the Street didn't count people since the Pizza Feed reached many of their clientele.

collect better data

The Bellingham School District improved its reporting by configuring their database to identify children in family clusters. Their count amounted to 159 individuals and 109 households. Last year, each child was entered as an individual with no relation to others who were entered.



A PowerPoint presentation was e-mailed to participating organizations explaining how to fill out the form. Training was provided as well at the

Whatcom Homeless Coalition monthly meeting before the count. This framework led to better data collection and more complete forms.

Volunteers at the Pizza Feed filled out the forms for each homeless person thus the information obtained was quite complete. Bellingham School District this year configured their database to identify 159 homeless children into 109 household clusters. Last year each child was entered as an individual and no households were counted.

solicit trained volunteers to help with the count

A 'volunteer coordinator' arranged for trained individuals from the Severe Weather Shelter volunteer system to help at facilities where surveyors were needed.

Volunteers counted people at the Bellingham Food Bank on three days during the week of the count. Since the Food Bank serves different people each day, this improvement led to more people being counted at this facility (44 were counted in 2006 vs. 16 in 2005).

Street outreach volunteers surveyed homeless at Soups On, on Bellingham's downtown streets, and visited homeless in their camps throughout the week and filled out forms.

The County Jail results were more thorough this year as well. A qualified volunteer filled out forms for each homeless inmate using the jail database rather than relying on the inmates to fill out the forms and returning them. This year 29 inmates were counted vs. 9 in 2005. The Department of Corrections also provided forms with 43 counted in 2006 and 28 in 2005.

The Disabled Veterans set up a table at the Pizza Feed and made appointments to counsel veterans who were not receiving benefits. The Bellingham Veterans Center participated again this year as well.

All law enforcement agencies countywide provided their officers with forms throughout the week of the count should they encounter homeless individuals. Some jurisdictions encountered no homeless, (Everson and Lynden) but their participation is nonetheless an important component of an accurate count.

Two volunteers from Northwest Youth Services visited the downtown bus station, the downtown library upon opening, and the Bellis Fair Mall around noon on the count day to identify any homeless. They did not count any individuals, but this should be done again in future counts.

The Severe Weather Shelter was ready to conduct a count had a severe weather event occurred during the week of the count. This did not occur, but this option should also be planned for every year.

survey results

The January Point-in-Time Homeless Count results:

- 1255 individuals were counted as homeless
- 922 households were counted (lone individuals are a household and each household of multiple people counts as one household)
- Of the homeless individuals, 57% male and 43% female
- 35% are under the age of 18 years old -- if the numbers of minors living temporarily with others is included, the percentage is closer to 40% which correlates to the same percentage of minors in the 2005 count
- 360 individuals were not included in the final count number but were accounted for as living temporarily with others, couch surfing, or doubled up.
- There were proportionately more homeless females ages 0–25 than men, but there are more men that are homeless and older than 26.



The results of a decade and a half of research to determine what works to end homelessness are fairly conclusive about the most effective approaches.

Providing housing helps currently homeless people leave homelessness. It also prevents people from losing their homes.

In fact, without housing, virtually nothing else works.³

Urban Institute
<http://www.urban.org/publications/310305.html>,
Martha Burt

Age	2006	%	2005	%
0-5	139	11%	83	10%
6-12	209	17%	158	19%
13-17	89	7%	100	12%
18-20	70	6%	58	7%
21-25	120	10%	64	8%
26-35	198	16%	87	11%
36-45	207	16%	131	16%
46-55	163	13%	106	13%
56-64	53	4%	32	4%
over 65	7	1%	5	1%

Age and gender breakout	2006				2005			
	# Males	% *	# Females	%	# Males	%	# Females	%
0-17	206	47%	231	53%	198	55%	162	45%
18-25	92	48%	98	52%	44	50%	44	50%
26-45	225	56%	180	44%	135	55%	110	45%
46-65+	156	70%	67	30%	99	68%	47	32%
Totals	679		576		476		363	
Count Total	1255				839			

increase in people living in poverty

People living in poverty are at increasing risk of becoming homeless.

- *Whatcom County's poverty rates tend to be higher than those of Washington State. In 1998, there were 5,686 children living in households with incomes below poverty level (Community Counts, 2002). In 1999 the Federal Census indicates 20% were living below poverty in Whatcom County (<http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/53/5305280.html>)*
- *In Washington, an extremely low income household (earning \$19,251, 30% of the Area Median Income of \$64,171) can afford monthly rent* of no more than \$481, while the Fair Market Rent for a two bedroom unit is \$745. (www.nlihc.org/oor2005/)*
- *A minimum wage earner (earning \$7.16 per hour) can afford monthly rent of no more than \$372. (www.nlihc.org/oor2005/)*

Demographics Snapshot	
2003 population	174,500
# households	64,446
median household income	\$40,005
% residents living in poverty	14%
# Children living in poverty	5,798
% residents with a disability	15.5%
% residents >25 who graduated from high school	87%

Whatcom County Demographics

Whatcom County Department of Health

* A unit is considered affordable if it costs no more than 30% of the renter's income.

- *An SSI recipient (receiving \$564 monthly) can afford monthly rent of no more than \$169, while the Fair Market Rent for a one-bedroom unit is \$605. (www.nlihc.org/oor2005/)*
- *In Washington, a worker earning the Minimum Wage (\$7.16 per hour) must work 80 hours per week in order to afford a two-bedroom unit at the area's Fair Market rent.*



Number of Households (2000)

Location	Total Households	Renter Households	Renter Households as % of total households
Total Households Washington	2,271,398	804,413	35%
Whatcom County	64,446	23,575	37%

From www.nlihc.org/oor2005/

increase in housing costs

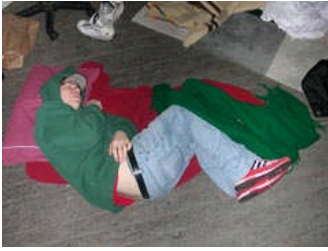
Low wage earning has put housing out of reach for many workers; in every state, more than the minimum wage is required to afford a one- or two-bedroom apartment at fair-market rent. (*Federal Register*)

- *A U.S. Department of Labor study [December 2005] showed the average weekly wage in Whatcom County for the first quarter of 2005 was \$578, for an annual salary of \$30,056. Whatcom County was second only to Yakima County with the lowest average wage among the state's nine large counties with a workforce larger than 100,000, and ranks in the bottom one-tenth among the large counties nationwide. (Bellingham Herald, Dec. 15, 2005)*
- *“The numbers show that Whatcom County has a higher-than-average concentration of jobs that tend to pay lower salaries, such as agriculture, retail and leisure/hospitality. The area also has a lower-than-average concentration of jobs that pay higher salaries, including financial services, insurance, professional services and technical jobs.” (Bellingham Herald, Dec. 15, 2006)*

The vast majority of low-income parents today are working but still struggling to make ends meet: struggling to find and keep a toehold in a changing labor market, to keep up with their bills, to pay the spiraling costs of essentials like health care and housing, and to raise children with a chance of future success.

These families have much in common with other American families as they seek to balance work and family life, yet parents and children in low-income families are more financially vulnerable than those in higher-income families.

The Urban Institute



"In the Western world, it is clear that a lack of affordable housing is one of the leading contributing causes of homelessness today."
David Levinson,
Encyclopedia of Homelessness

- "... *Whatcom County has a long way to go to catch up to King (\$948 average salary per week), Snohomish (\$761), Pierce (\$683) and Thurston (\$676), as well as the national average (\$775).*" (*Bellingham Herald, Dec. 15, 2006*)
- *An estimated 45% of renters were unable to afford Fair Market Rent (FMR) for a two bedroom in Bellingham. A renter would have to work 100 hours a week at minimum wage to afford rent on a 2BR home at FMR (1998, NLIHC Out of Reach)*
- *By 1999 the annual real wage in Whatcom County declined \$3,800 from its peak in 1971. Twenty-six percent of homeowners pay 30% or more for housing. Renters spend 55% of income on rent -- 6% higher than the average renter statewide. (Community Counts, 2002). In 2003, the hourly wage required to rent a two-bedroom apartment in Whatcom County was \$13.77/hour which is more than double the minimum wage.*

the trends for low-income wage earners

- Home ownership is up, but so are foreclosures and bankruptcies.
- Welfare rolls are down; the poverty rate is trending up.
- Unemployment is falling, but wages have consistently lagged inflation.

The Bottom Line: An increasing number of low-income families work and own assets like homes; but at the same time financial insecurity have increased. (*The Brookings Institution Metropolitan Policy Program: Laboratories for Capitalism: How States Get the Market Right for Working Families*)

high turnover in the homeless population

The high turnover in the homeless population documented by recent studies, suggests that many more people experience homelessness than previously thought; however, most of these people do not remain homeless (National Coalition for the Homeless).

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

- *In Whatcom County's count in 2005 and 2006, 1/3 indicated they were homeless less than a month (414 in 2006 and 291 in 2005).*
- *See page 23 on duration of homelessness for further explanation.*

lack of health care and lack of any health insurance

22% of the single adult homeless population in the U.S. suffers from some form of severe and persistent mental illness. (U.S. Conference of Mayors, 2001)

- *In Whatcom County's count in both 2005 and 2006, 25% listed a mental health disability (313 in 2006 and 212 in 2005).*

Nearly 1/3 of people living in poverty in the US have no health care insurance.

- *In Whatcom County's count in 2005 and 2006, 25% responded that they have unmet physical, medical, or dental needs (327 in 2006 and 210 in 2005)*

drug and alcohol abuse

34% of homeless adults experience an addiction with higher rates among single men (The U.S. Conference of Mayors, 2001).

- *In Whatcom County's count in 2006 23% (293) listed substance abuse as a disability whereas in 2005 just over 15% listed substance abuse as a disability;*
- *33% of the homeless counted listed drug and/or alcohol abuse as a reason for their homelessness in 2006 as compared to 19% in 2005 (303 in 2006 and 157 in 2005)*

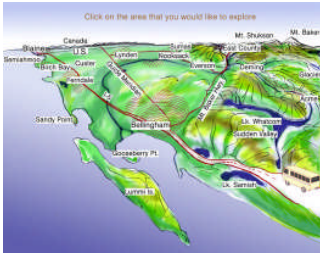
domestic violence

34% of cities surveyed by the U.S. Conference of Mayors identified domestic violence as a primary cause of homelessness (U.S. Conference of Mayors, 1998). Nationally, approximately half of all women and children experiencing homelessness are fleeing domestic violence.



- *In 2006 nearly 20% listed domestic violence as a reason for homelessness. In 2005 25% were victims of domestic violence. (163 in 2006 and 206 in 2005)*
- *Domestic violence was the second most prevalent cause of homelessness in 2005; in 2006 it was the fifth most common reason for homelessness. The variance between 2005 and 2006 can be attributed to a broader spectrum of organizations participating in the count this year. The larger number of organizations participating in 2006 could reduce the impact of data provided by organizations serving victims of domestic violence.*
- *In Whatcom County's count in 2006 8% of those affected by domestic violence were under the age of 18 whereas in 2005 11% were minors (106 in 2006 and 90 in 2005)*
- *In Whatcom County in 2006 in a ratio of 4 to 1, those listing domestic violence as one cause of their homelessness amounted to 121 adult females and 35 adult males*

variables impacting Whatcom County



Whatcom County's homeless numbers may be impacted by a number of varying factors which should be considered when interpreting the data:

- Whatcom County is a departure point for Canada and Alaska. Some homeless individuals or families follow I-5 north and end up here. Often they cannot proceed across the border to their intended destination because they lack the proper paperwork.
- When encountering a homeless person, some county jurisdictions provide a bus ticket to Bellingham. Additionally, some homeless people living in rural and wooded areas of the county may come to Bellingham, albeit infrequently, for services throughout the year. Service providers have stated that obtaining transportation into Bellingham from outlying areas is difficult.
- East county areas outside of Deming are characterized by a decentralized population with four 'cultural centers' – Van Zandt's Everybody's Store, Deming's Dodson's, and Glacier/Maple Falls' Grahams and Kendall. Homelessness in these communities is hard to pinpoint because of this decentralization and the rural nature of the area. There are people living in substandard housing, in doubled up living arrangements, or camped on reservation property, but they are hard to find and a close approximation of the homeless is difficult to quantify.
- Within some populations, families that are doubled up don't see themselves as homeless – it's simply seen as "taking care of family". These numbers are difficult to quantify unless they are receiving services where their living arrangements are documented.
- It appears that seasonal workers do not remain in Whatcom County in significant numbers in the off-season. It's likely in the spring they migrate to farming communities in Whatcom County when work becomes available. Counts done in spring or fall might reveal better data concerning this population and show the impact of seasonal workers as they transition into and out of the labor pool.

survey specifics

The following categories represent data collected from the form itself. In every case gender and birth year had to be accounted for the information to be entered. Some questions only allowed one box to be checked whereas other questions the respondent checks all that apply.

age

Children who are homeless may reside with a parent who is homeless or may live without a parent and live with friends or relatives. They may live in transitional housing or an emergency shelter. It's possible they are awaiting foster care or adoption or they and a parent are fleeing domestic violence.

It's important to note that in 2006 178 minors living temporarily with others were not reflected in the final count of 1255. The potential instability of their living arrangements and the chance of them becoming homeless at any time are issues to which local jurisdictions must pay attention and plan.

- 35% of those counted in 2006 were under the age of 18 as compared to 40% in 2005. (437 in 2006 and 357 in 2005)
- In 2006, 16% were between 18 and 25 compared to 14% in 2005 (190 in 2006 and 117 in 2005).
- In 2006, 34% were between ages 26 and 45 compared to 27% in 2005. (405 in 2006 and 226 in 2005)
- In 2006, 18% were 46 and older compared to 16% in 2005. (223 in 2006 and 137 in 2005)

The variance in the number of children counted between the 2005 and 2006 results in this area can be attributed to:

- Additional agencies participating in the count contributing more adults to the count.
- A change in the count statistical analysis. The 2006 final number of 1255 homeless individuals did not include doubled up or couch surfers. Many children live in a doubled up situation or are temporarily living with others.



Age	2006		2005	
	Individuals	%	Individuals	%
0-5	139	11%	103	12%
6-12	209	17%	160	19%
13-17	89	7%	94	11%
18-20	70	6%	61	7%
21-25	120	10%	56	7%
26-35	198	16%	98	12%
36-45	207	16%	128	15%
46-55	163	13%	105	13%
56-64	53	4%	27	3%
65+	7	1%	5	1%

gender

Gender comparisons in the age ranges are difficult to obtain with database query limitations. The following are approximated comparisons.

- In 2006, 55% of the homeless were men and 45% were women compared to 2005 where 57% of the homeless were men and 43% were women.
- In 2006, there were more females than males under the age of 18. In 2005, there were more males than females under the age of 18.
- In both 2006 and 2005, about one-half of those aged 18 -25 were male and one-half were female.
- In both 2006 and 2005, there were about 5 – 7% more males than females in the 26 – 45 age category.
- In both 2006 and 2005, in the over 45 category, males were about 70% of the population vs. 30% for females.

household composition

Household composition refers to those who stated they were living with other family members vs. those who were living alone.

- In 2006, 73% of all individuals were a part of a household compared to 79% in 2005. In 2006, 27% were lone individuals compared to 21% in 2005.
- The Pizza Feed and the participation of street outreach organizations accounted for more of our street homeless population who are most likely to be lone individuals thus increasing the numbers in the 2006 count in this category.

**Population
breakdown
by zip code**

Not every person indicates where their last residence was for six months or more. In 2006 59% of the respondents provided this information.

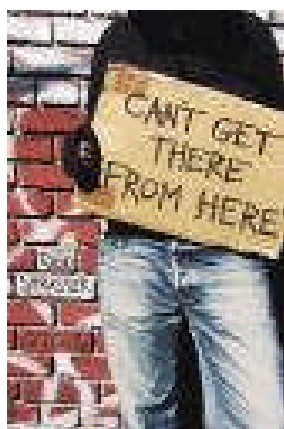
	Total Count	House- holds	Single Clients	Individuals in Families
Blaine/Birch Bay: 98230	17	10	7	10
Bellingham: 98225 - 98229	604	431	324	280
Ferndale: 98248	29	21	14	15
Deming: 98244	15	9	6	9
Everson: 98247	28	8	1	27
Sumas: 98295	8	6	5	3
Lynden: 98264	35	14	5	30
Nooksack: 98276	1	1	1	0
Maple Falls: 98266	9	5	3	6
Acme: 98220	0	0	0	0
TOTALS	742	505	366	380
Unknown OR out of county/state	513			

Note: The total of single clients plus individuals in families equals the total count; totals are the total number responding.

The form this year added two questions designed to learn more about where respondents were living 2 months ago and 6 months ago and to determine if migration patterns existed.

The two questions were: In what city were you living six months ago? In what city were you living 2 months ago?

- 25% of those who responded were from outside the county or the state as of six months ago. 12% of those who responded were from outside the county or out of state as of two months ago. This could be attributed to a seasonal influx of people or a higher population of rural or migrant workers.
- More homeless individuals identified Lynden and Ferndale as their home in the summer (8% of the total who responded) than in the early winter (5% of the total who responded).
- 60% (329) of those who responded were living in Bellingham as of six months ago whereas 76% (387) of those who responded were residing in Bellingham as of two months ago.



duration of homelessness

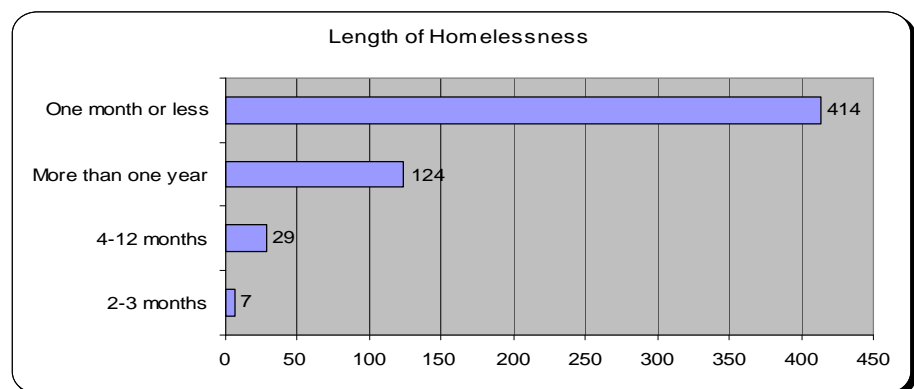
Homelessness in America is a "revolving-door" crisis. Many people exit homelessness quickly, but many more individuals become homeless every day. During a year's time, four or five times as many people experience homelessness as are homeless on any particular day.
<http://www.urban.org/publications/310305.html>
October 1, 2001

Determining the duration of homelessness was problematic this year. 55% of the people counted did not respond to this question. Percentages listed below are based on the total of those responding.

- Of the nearly 414 who responded to this question, 73% were homeless one month or less* compared to 291 in 2005 or 75%.
- Nearly 22% of the 570 households who responded to this question listed themselves as homeless for more than a year compared to 20% in 2005.
- The 2006 14% of the total counted were chronically homeless compared to 11% in 2005. (See page 31 and 32 for more details on chronically homeless.)

* Some questions exist regarding the accuracy of the numbers for those listing their length of homelessness as less than one month. The question asks, "In what month and year did you become homeless?" Some agencies may not be reporting the date of homelessness – they may be listing the date the individual/family entered the agency's system. Clarification on this aspect of the count should be made in future years.

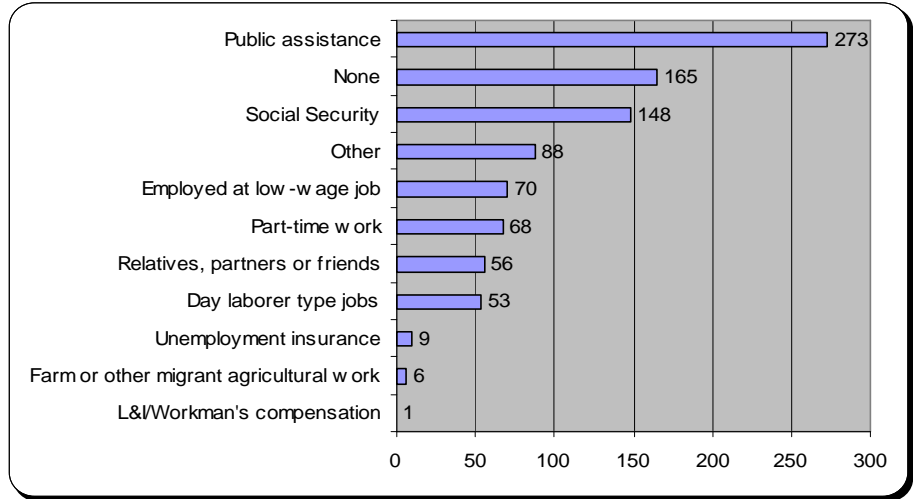
Based on this variable, it's possible that the category of more than one month to under a year is under-reported. In 2006, only 6% and in 2005, only 3% of those responding were listed in the more than one month and less than twelve month categories. It's important to note that national statistics also indicate a higher proportion of people slipping into and back out of homelessness with their length of homelessness being one month or less. Whatcom County's data may point to this as well.



sources of income

The number of respondents reporting information about their sources of income increased this year. This data reveals that of the 922 households counted in 2006, at least one-fourth of them were working poor and over half were receiving some assistance.

Source(s) of household income	2006	2005
Some type of assistance	565	247
Some type of work	207	41
No work or assistance	165	92



disabilities

"22% of single homeless adults suffer from some form of severe and persistent mental illness." *National Coalition for the Homeless*

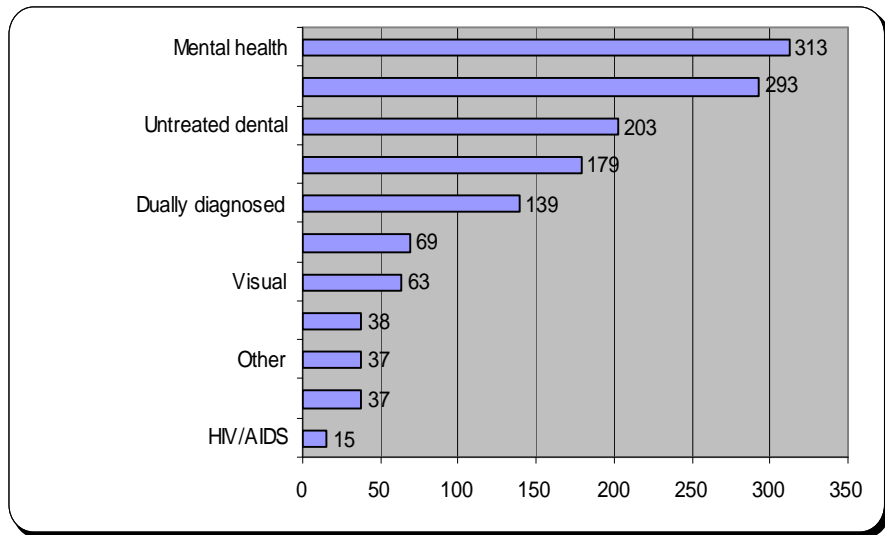
Many respondents indicated having multiple disabilities or disabling conditions. Of those responding to this question, mental health, substance abuse, untreated dental problems, and medical issues were common disabling conditions as self-identified by the respondents. In the 2006 and the 2005 count, mental health and substance abuse topped the list of disabling conditions experienced by those 25% each of who responded to the question. A number of homeless people have untreated dental issues which often lead them to obtain treatment through a service provider. This contact may open the door for addressing other issues. The numbers citing untreated dental problems in 2006 were 203 (16%) in vs. 90 (9%) in 2005.

It's important to note in this disabilities section. It can be assumed that the numbers below represent the minimum number of homeless experiencing these issues. In reality, there are likely more homeless people who didn't respond to the question but face one or more of these disabling conditions.

Disabilities	Individuals (2006)
Mental health	313
Alcohol or drug abuse	293
Untreated dental	203
Physical/medical (permanent)	179
Dually diagnosed (mental health and alcohol/drug abuse)	139



"Most studies show that single homeless adults are more likely to be male than female."
National Coalition for the Homeless



Mental health

In both 2005 and 2006, 25% of the total number counted listed a mental health disability. In both 2005 and 2006, a little over 60% were males and 40% were females.

- In 2006, 319 individuals responded (195 males and 124 females). In 2005, 212 responded (128 males and 84 females).
- In 2005, 22 females and 72 males listed mental health under disability and under reason for homelessness. In 2006, 64 females (a modest increase) and 112 males listed mental health as a disability and a reason for homelessness.

disabilities continued

Physical/medical

In both 2005 and 2006, 14% of those responding listed a physical/medical disability. If temporary physical/medical disabilities are included, the number for 2006 increases to 20%.

Developmental

In 2005 and 2006, those individuals with a developmental disability were between 3% and 4%.

Substance Abuse

In 2006 23% and 16% in 2005 identified substance abuse disabilities. This marks a significant variance in the number. It's not known whether this is simply better reporting of the numbers or attributable to an actual increase in substance abuse issues. Since other disability categories are showing the same proportionate percentages year over year, this increase may indicate a shift in this particular area.

HIV/AIDS

In 2006 15 individuals reported HIV/AIDS as a disability compared to 20 individuals in 2005.

Dually diagnosed

Those respondents listing both drug/alcohol abuse and mental illness disabilities were at 8% (105) in 2006 as compared to 2% (20) in 2005.

substance abuse

Addiction or "problem drinking" of one or more individuals in the family, affects the entire family including children and partners.

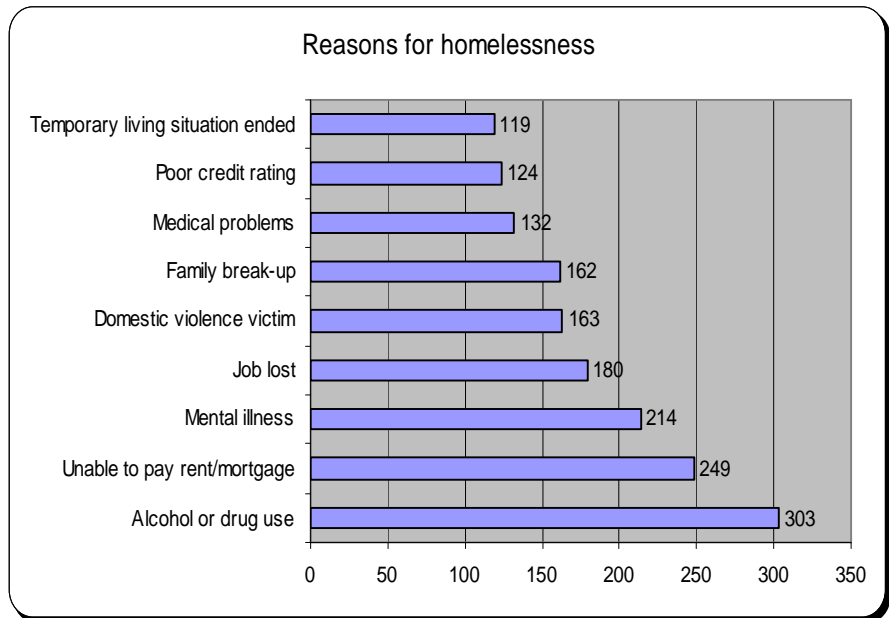
- In 2006, 448 individuals vs. 192 individuals in 2005 reported loosing housing because of problems related to substance use.
- In 2006, 326 households and in 2005, 161 households lost housing related to another household member's substance abuse problem.
- In 2006 of those responding 177 females and 205 males reported substance abuse was a reason for their homelessness.
- The increase in completely filled out forms and in the count of adult and street populations may account for some of the variances in the numbers listed above.

reasons for homelessness

“Vast increases in homelessness did not occur until the 1980’s when incomes and housing options for those living on the margins began to diminish rapidly.”
National Coalition for the Homeless

Reasons for homelessness were varied but the most common contributing factors to homelessness remained consistent from 2005 to 2006 with the exception of domestic violence.

2006	2005
#1 - Alcohol or drug use	#1 – Mental Health
#2 - Unable to pay rent/mortgage	#2 – Domestic Violence
#3 - Mental illness	#3 – Alcohol/Drug Abuse
#4 - Job lost	#4 – Physical/ Permanent
#5 - Domestic violence victim	#5 – Dually Diagnosed
#6 - Family break-up	



housing status

For the question, “Where did you stay last night?” 2006 had a 95% response rate vs. 70% in 2005 making this data set quite complete.

- The category of temporarily living with others is the same as the one used last year; however the 360 individuals living with other people **were not** included in the final count total of 1255. They are at high-risk for becoming homeless, are at times difficult to identify, and lack the stability of a home, but by federal definition, these individuals are not considered homeless. This gap between federal definition and actual experience poses many challenges for local jurisdictions trying to reduce homelessness. A more accurate statement of the actual homeless for Whatcom County would be inclusive of this population.

Types of Homeless Housing

- **Emergency Shelter:** short-term (generally 1-90 day stays) beds which serve the needs of homeless persons. "Shelter" is generally defined as emergency housing with limited or insufficient services to assist the homeless person to move to independence in affordable housing following their stay.
- **Transitional Housing:** (up to 24 months) beds are combined with critical supportive services, providing the time needed to help individuals transition to independent living in affordable housing.
- **Motel Voucher:** Motel vouchers are used for emergency shelter and at times for longer periods as transitional housing. These motel/ apartment voucher arrangements are paid for by a public or private agency.

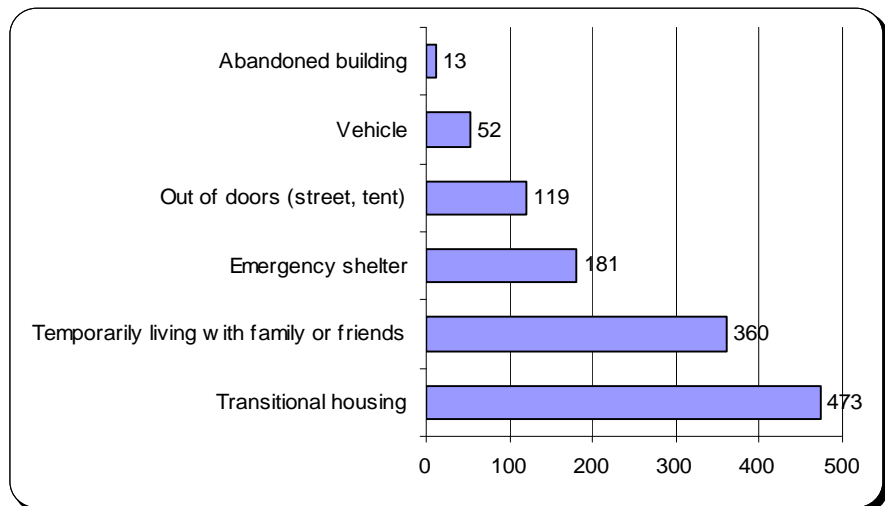
- The categories with the most increase in 2006 over 2005 were transitional housing with two and one-half times more people indicating transitional housing in 2006 than 2005 and temporarily living with others over 12 times greater than in 2005. This variance could be attributable to better information collection in 2006 in that only 425 people indicated where they were staying in last year's count vs. 1198 this year.
- In 2006 1014 were sheltered and 184 were unsheltered in 2006.
- The 2006 count did not have complete data on those served with motel vouchers.

Type of housing	2006		2005	
	# responding	%	# responding	%
Transitional housing	473	38%	199	24%
Temporarily living w/ family/friends	360	29%	29	4%
Emergency shelter	181	14%	99	14%
Out of doors (street, tent)	119	9%	72	9%
Vehicle	52	4%	26	3%
Abandoned building	13	1%	0	0%

% based on the 1198 who responded in 2006 and the 425 who responded in 2005.

current housing status	Males		2006 only females	
	responding	male %	responding	female %
Transitional housing	244	52%	229	48%
Temporarily living w/ family/friends	165	46%	195	54%
Emergency shelter	103	57%	78	43%
Living outdoors, in a vehicle, or an abandoned building	141	77%	43	23%

% based on the number responding in each housing status category



domestic violence

In 2006, 163 of the respondents were victims of domestic violence compared to 130 in 2005. As a proportion of the total counted, it would appear that domestic violence had declined. But in March 2005, Whatcom County District Court Probation indicated a significant increase in new domestic violence referrals per year. (*Bellingham Whatcom County Commission Against Domestic Violence, March 2005; www.co.whatcom.wa.us/boards/dv_whatcom042505.pdf*)

- In 2006, 416 individuals accounting for 268 households reported as a reason for their homeless a combination of domestic violence and family breakup.
- The variance between 2005 and 2006 can be attributed to a broader spectrum of organizations participating in the count this year potentially reducing the impact of their data.
- In 2006 of those responding, 106 children experienced domestic violence as one reason for their homelessness (51 boys and 55 girls)

veterans



The VA estimates that nearly 200,000 veterans are homeless on any given night. And more than **half a million** experience homelessness over the course of a year. *NCVH website*

Nationally, veterans experience inadequate wages, lack of affordable housing, and lack of accessible, affordable health care as major barriers to stability. 23% of the homeless population are veterans and 33% of male homeless populations are veterans (www.NCHV.org/background.cfm) 76% experience alcohol, drug, or mental health problems (NCHV) Nationally, 45% of veterans need help finding job and 37% need help finding housing. (NCHV)

- In Whatcom County, 125 people in 2006 vs. 62 in 2005 or 14% of the total counted in 2006 and 10% of the total count in 2005 answered yes to “Has anyone in your household ever served on active duty in the Armed Forces of the US?”
- In 2006, 29 vs. 25 in 2005 responded that someone in their household was receiving Veterans' Administration benefits.
- The 2006 count identified 12% of the total counted as of veterans status - either receiving benefit or have someone in the household who served in the armed forces

- In 2006, 129 veterans were males and 23 were females
- The Whatcom County form added two additional questions regarding the branch of service and the era the veterans served. The following is a reflection of this data:

The percentages listed here are based on the 922 households counted.

	Korea	Vietnam	Gulf War	Iraq	Other or Post - Vietnam
Army National Guard					6
Coast Guard		3	1		1
Marine Corp		8	6	1	1
Air Force		5			5
Navy		4	1		12
Foreign					1
Army	6	5			23

criminal convictions

In 2006, 12% (151) of the respondents had a been convicted of a misdemeanor or a felony compared to 7% in 2005. (151 in 2006 and 60 in 2005) – a 5% variance between 2006 and 2005. Of the total responding, 142 were males and 73 were females.

housing costs and job-related issues

In 2006, 14% of the respondents listed they have been evicted compared to 11% who responded in 2005. In 2006, 31% (393) of those who responded listed an inability to pay rent or mortgage or percentage was 25% (216).

- In both 2005 and 2006, between 7 and 8% listed an inability to pay rent or mortgage and/or eviction for non-payment *coupled with* low wage/part-time work, a job loss, and a lack of job skills.
- In 2006, 228 people listed they worked at a low paying, part-time, day laborer, or farm-work type of job. These working poor amounted to 17% of the total of homeless counted in Whatcom County.

HIV/AIDS

In 2006, 15 individuals or 1% of the total counted listed HIV/AIDS as a disability. In 2005, the 20 individuals or 2% of the total counted had HIV/AIDS.

chronic homelessness



Chronically homeless individuals may have a major dysfunction and are disabled by severe mental illness and/or substance abuse.

Chronically homeless must be homeless more than one year OR more than three times in three years AND have a disability. In 2006, of those responding to questions regarding the frequency and duration of their homelessness, the following categories further identify those who have a pattern of homelessness in addition to those who are chronic.

- The 2006 count had a higher count of chronically homeless with 14% of the total counted vs. 11% of the count in 2005.
- In 2006 and 2005, mental health, substance abuse and physical disabilities were evident in the majority of the chronically homeless. (see charts next page)
- Chronically homeless: 172 were homeless more than one year or more than three times in three years and have a disability
- 202 were homeless more than one year.
- 254 were homeless more than one year or more than three times in three years.
- 137 were homeless intermittently with three incidences of homelessness over a period of three years:

Research shows that the longer a person is homeless, the more detached from society they become. Multiple issues prevent them from acquiring stability. Safe housing is a critical step toward restoring this stability.

2005 Length of Time Homeless	Households	%
2-3 months	8	2%
4-12 months	23	6%
More than one year	75	19%
One month or less	291	73%
	397	
2006 Length of Time Homeless	Households	%
2-3 months	7	1%
4-12 months	29	5%
More than one year	124	22%
One month or less	414	72%
	574	

*The 2005 percentages above are based on the 397 who responded.
The 2006 percentages above are based on the 574 who responded.*

(See charts showing 2006 and 2005 on next page)

Chronic Homelessness Chart (2006 and 2005)

2006 Whatcom Count of Chronically Homeless				Chronically homeless
Chronically Homeless	Homeless > 1 year	> 3 incidences of homelessness in 3 years	Homeless > 1 year OR > 3 incidences of homelessness in 3 years	Homeless > 1 year OR > 3 incidences of homelessness in 3 years AND a disability
In supportive housing	38	23	49	28
In transitional housing	48	35	70	53
In emergency shelter	43	35	51	34
With family or friends	0	0	0	0
Living in vehicle	24	11	29	18
Living outside	50	28	55	41
ALL*	202	137	254	172
Chronic Population Detail				
Mental Health	118	69%		
Substance Abuse	94	55%		
Physical	75	44%		
HIV/AIDS	2	1%		
Veteran	45	26%		

2005 Whatcom Count of Chronically Homeless				Chronically homeless
Chronic Homelessness	Homeless > 1 year	> 3 incidences of homelessness in 3 years	Homeless > 1 year OR > 3 incidences of homelessness in 3 years	Homeless > 1 year OR > 3 incidences of homelessness in 3 years AND a disability
In supportive housing	10	0	10	10
In transitional housing	59	5	62	30
In emergency shelter	12	6	14	6
With family or friends	37	16	43	24
Living in vehicle	8	1	8	5
Living outside	27	11	31	19
ALL*	178	51	200	111
Chronic Population Detail				
Mental Health	83	88%		
Substance Abuse	56	60%		
Physical	44	47%		
HIV/AIDS	5	5%		
Veteran	22	23%		

*Both charts include those who did not report housing status, so number is larger than the sum of the above

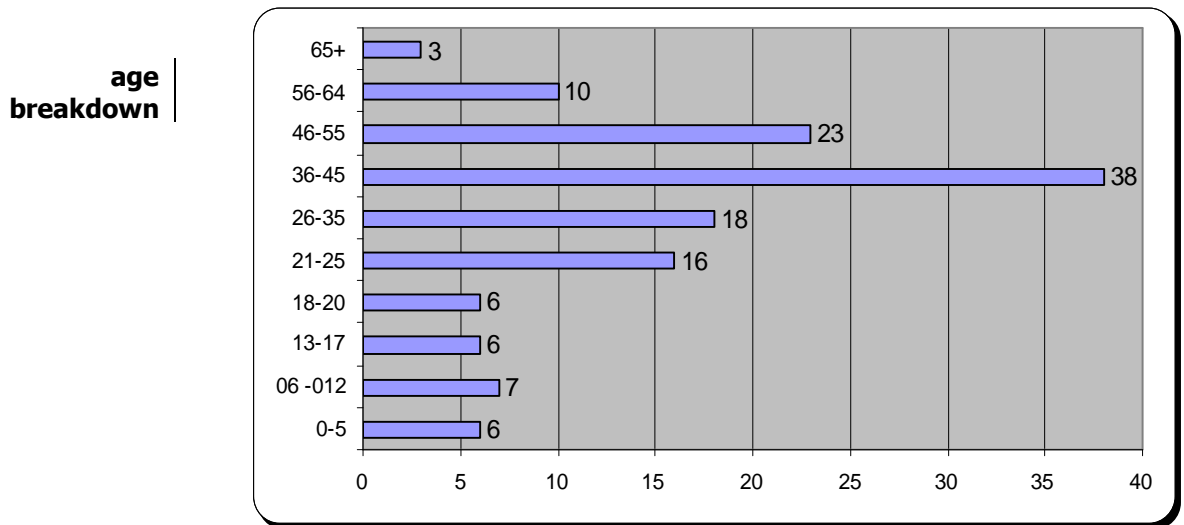
Addendum - the pizza feed event

This event was a success for many reasons. Holding the event in a well-known and trusted location to the homeless in Bellingham near the bus station helped make the meal accessible to a high number of people. The 4-8 p.m. timeframe allowed those who attended to connect with bus service. The event was publicized by many agencies that posted flyers and distributed postcard invites.

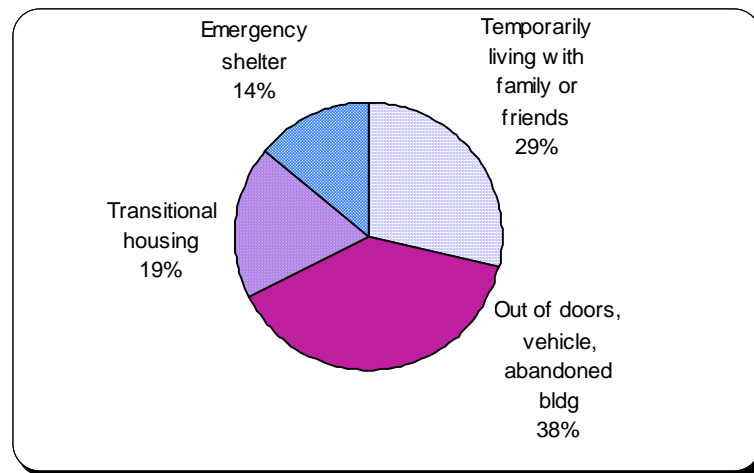
Youth volunteers from the Boys and Girls Club, Rainbow Center employees, and volunteers from the community served food at the Pizza Feed. A canopy was placed outside the Rainbow Center to attract attention. While it proved unnecessary to the event’s success, some people did choose to eat outside under the canopy. It did announce that something special was happening at the Rainbow Center – a place not normally open in the evening. Outside signage announced the event and invited people inside. 75 large pizzas were consumed, 5 bags of fruit distributed, 250 candy bars rewarded for completing a form, and several pounds of coffee, juice and pop were served. Counselors from the Rainbow Center and community volunteers including a City Council member interviewed the homeless inside the facility and filled out the forms for them. Some street outreach organizations confirmed that they didn’t count any homeless individuals on Thursday or Friday night because they had already been counted at the Pizza Feed. This event should be duplicated in more places around the county in future counts.

Some of the statistics of the people attending this event are as follows:

prevalence of disabling conditions	Mental health	53
	Physical/medical (permanent)	36
	Untreated dental	29
	Alcohol or drug abuse	22



Current Housing Status



Sources cited in this report

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US Department of Housing and Urban Development - www.hud.gov/homeless/index.cfm
http://seattlepi.nwsourc.com/local/259649_pooroverview16.html

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