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CORRECTION: A previous version of this media release reported that 16% fewer individuals living homeless were counted in 2019 than in 2018. The correct percentage of change is 14% fewer people living homeless in 2019. This version has been changed to reflect that correction.

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2019 Count of Individuals Living Homeless Shows Largest Decrease Since 2012

Bellingham, WA - The Opportunity Council and the Whatcom County Health Department recently published results of the 2019 Point-In-Time (PIT) Count, an annual snapshot of homelessness in our community. This year's results show the largest decrease in homelessness since 2012, with 14% fewer individuals living homeless than in 2018. Participants in the count cited eviction or loss of housing as the most common factor that contributed to their homelessness.

The decrease in homelessness in 2019 is in part attributable to the new [22 North supportive housing facility](#) and expanded programming to support individuals facing homelessness. In fact the services provided by non-profit partner agencies of the Whatcom Homeless Service Center collectively helped 2,281 individuals to find temporary or permanent housing, or financial assistance to prevent homelessness in 2018.

Five hundred and fifteen (515) households comprised of 700 individuals who spent the night homeless were counted in the January 2019 Point-In-Time Count. Of those:

- 280 households were sheltered, meaning they had a temporary place to stay.
- 234 households were unsheltered, meaning they did not have a place to stay. Unsheltered people often sleep in a car or on the street.
- 119 individuals were aged 55 or older.
- 72 households were families with children (207 individuals).
- 394 households were single-person adult households.

Nearly half (47%) of the individuals identified as female, and the median age of all respondents was 37. Fifty-one (51) veterans were counted.

About one in five respondents had been homeless for more than a year, and approximately two out of three respondents last had a permanent residence in Whatcom County before becoming homeless. When asked what contributed to their lack of housing, participants identified eviction or loss of housing (identified by 43% of respondents), job loss or unemployment (31%), mental illness (27%), physical health or disability (22%), alcohol or substance abuse (22%), and domestic violence (22%) as the most common contributing factors.

The PIT Count Report also highlights elevated rates of homelessness for people of color, people with disabilities, people who have been institutionalized, and people who identify as LGBTQ.

The 2019 Whatcom County Point-In-Time Count took place during the week of January 21, 2019. The count is conducted annually by volunteers in every county in the U.S. as required by the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development. The PIT Count is widely acknowledged to be an undercount because participation is voluntary, some people experiencing homelessness cannot be located, and because the definition of homelessness excludes individuals, such as couch-surfers or doubled-up families, who don't have a home. Still, the report highlights important components of homelessness in our community, and consistent surveying practices means that the results enable useful year to year comparisons.

The full 2019 PIT Count Report is available at on the Opportunity Council's website (tinyurl.com/2019PIT).

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