Southern New Jersey Regional Homeless Assessment Report

2011

I. Introduction

In May of 2009, Congress passed the Homelessness Emergency Assistance and Rapid Transition to Housing Act (HEARTH). The HEARTH Act challenges communities to move from addressing homelessness to ending it through focusing on data driven planning, system analysis and monitoring, and setting performance standards/goals. Federal resources for homeless programs will be tied to a community's ability to effectively reduce the number of people experiencing homelessness and implement programs and processes that can successfully end homelessness. Use of local data on the homeless population and the programs within a community will play a critical role in planning and program development in order to end homelessness and will be essential for basic compliance with HEARTH Act regulations.

This report uses information from the New Jersey Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) to provide a snapshot of the characteristics of homeless households in the Northern New Jersey region. While this report provides very basic information about the homeless population in Southern New Jersey, it may serve as the foundation of a more in depth review of the population and its needs. Communities in New Jersey are well positioned to move towards data driven planning with the wealth of information available through HMIS. We hope this report will serve as an example of how to take the first step in using data to transform the system.

II Key Findings

- A total of 2,675 households were housed in HMIS participating emergency shelters or transitional housing programs during the January 1, 2011 – November 1, 2011 report period.
- There are 29 emergency shelter and transitional housing programs in Southern New Jersey.
- A total of 127 people were identified as chronically homeless.
- Persons of Black/African American descent were disproportionately homeless compared to other races (Similar to findings from the 2010 National Annual Homeless Assessment Report (AHAR).
- Individuals experienced a higher incidence of first-time homelessness compared to families.
- Among the children sheltered as part of a family, nearly two-thirds were under the age of six.
- Homeless Individual adults were more likely than homeless adults in families to be disabled (Similar to findings from the 2010 National AHAR).

III. Data Source

This Regional Homeless Assessment Report for Southern New Jersey analyzed data from the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) administered by New Jersey Housing and Mortgage Finance Agency (NJHMFA), the HMIS Lead Agency. In New Jersey, NJHMFA utilizes software developed by Foothold Technology as the primary HMIS system for the state. Data analyzed included that from all Southern New Jersey homeless programs for Atlantic, Camden, Cape May, Cumberland, Gloucester and Salem Counties.

Data from the Department of Housing and Urban Development's 2010 Annual Homeless Assessment Report (AHAR) to Congress was also analyzed as a comparison to the regional data. This is the most recent national data available from HUD. The AHAR provides estimates of the number and characteristics along with service patterns of all people who participated in residential programs for the homeless during the 2010 federal Fiscal Year (October 2009-September 2010).

Information about unduplicated homeless and formerly homeless families and individuals who used emergency shelter and transitional housing during the 10-month period between January 1, 2011 – November 1, 2011 was gathered from HMIS.

Data was collected in the following categories:
1. total number served,
2. total number of adults vs. children,
3. total number of persons homeless for the first time,
4. length of homeless episode prior to program entry,
5. average length of program stay emergency shelter vs. transitional housing,
6. causes of homelessness,
7. disabling condition,
8. veteran status,
9. race,
10. ethnicity,
11. gender,
12. age range , and
13. chronically homeless.

The data in this report was analyzed according to four reporting categories that are organized based on shelter type and individual/family type.

- Families in Emergency Shelters
- Families in Transitional Housing
- Individuals in Emergency Shelters
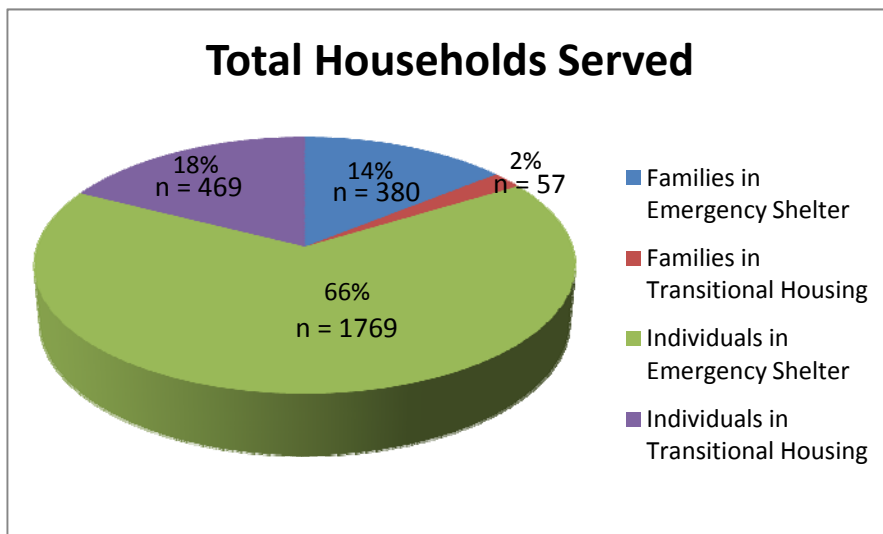- Individuals in Transitional Housing

Families include households with at least one child age 17 or younger and at least one adult age 18 or older. All others were considered homeless Individuals.

IV. Findings

The following section provides a summary of the demographic characteristics of homeless households in the Southern New Jersey region.
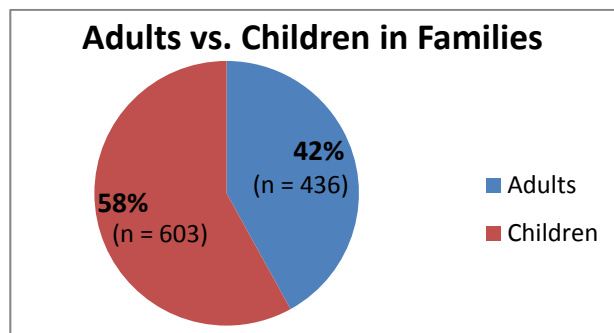
Total Homeless Population.
A total of 2,675 households which involved 3,277 persons were housed in Southern Region HMIS participating emergency shelters or transitional housing programs during the January 1, 2011 – November 1, 2011 report period. This represents 21% of all 12,981 households and 19% of the 17,100 persons who were homeless throughout New Jersey

Total Households Served

during the report period. Out of those identified as homeless in the Southern Region, 380 (14%) were families served in emergency shelters and 57 (2%) were families served in transitional housing. 1,769 (66%) of the total population were individuals served in emergency shelters and 469 (18%) individuals served in transitional housing.
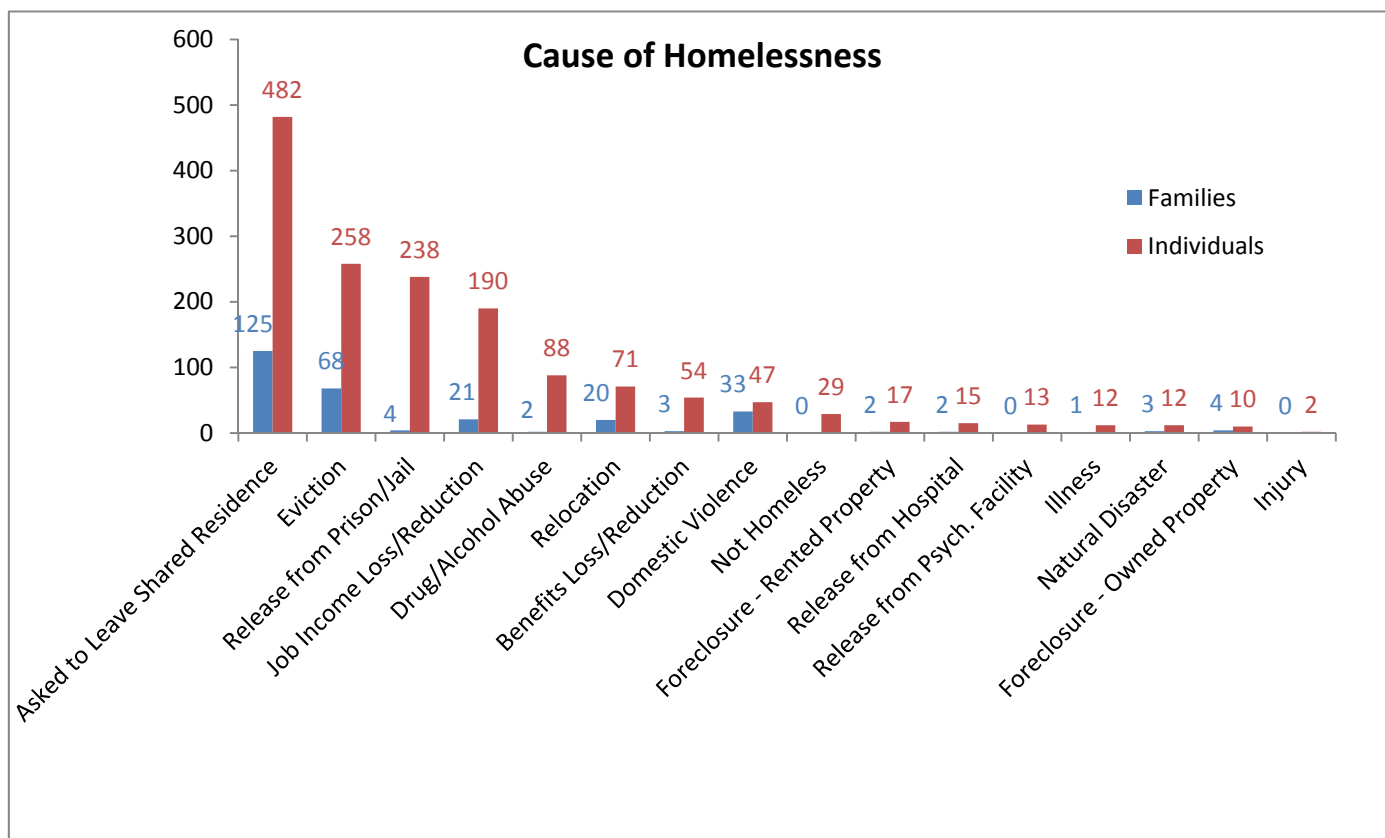
	Southern New Jersey	New Jersey	National
Total Persons Served	3,277	17,100	1,540,151
Emergency Shelter	2,647	13,041	1,268,068
Individuals	1,769	8,547	859,426
Families	878	4,494	408,642
Transitional Housing	630	4,059	272,083
Individuals	469	1,745	137,992
Families	161	2,314	134,091

Adults vs. Children in Families. The average size of a homeless family sheltered in emergency shelter in Southern New Jersey is 2 persons while the average size of a family sheltered in transitional housing is 3 persons. Children represented 58% of persons sheltered as part of a family in both emergency shelters and transitional housing. Very few persons, less than 2%, sheltered as part of a family were over the age of 50. Among the children sheltered in the family population, the majority were under the age of six:

Adults vs. Children in Families

- 335 (67%) of the 499 children in emergency shelters were under age 6

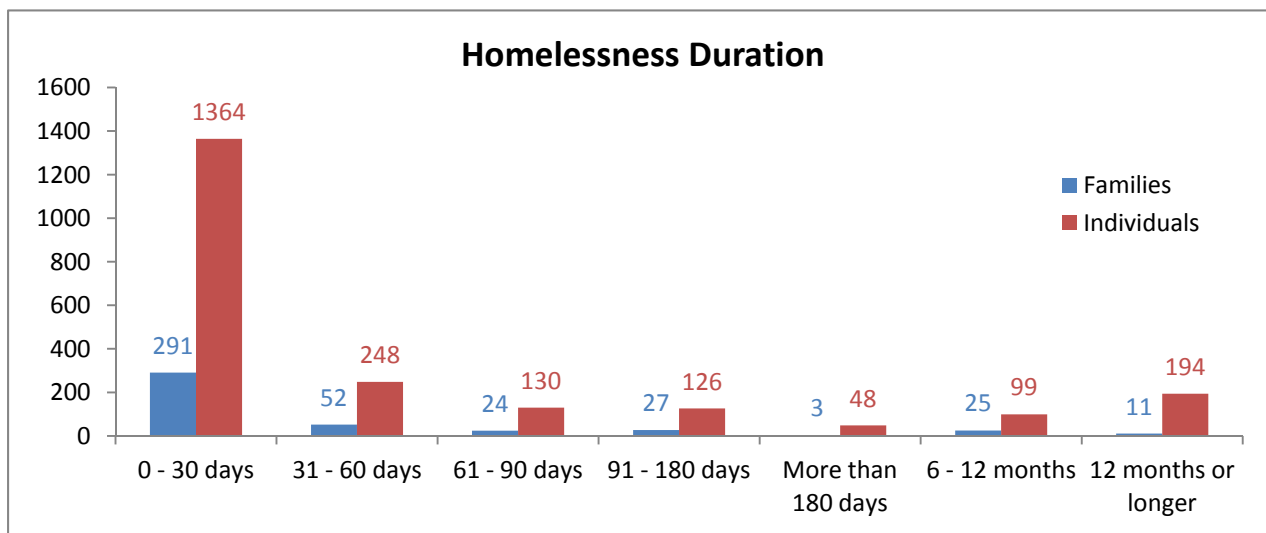- 50 (48%) of the 104 children in transitional housing were under age 6

Cause of Homelessness. Of the top five reasons for homelessness given by families and individuals in both emergency shelters and transitional housing, the number one was being asked to leave a shared residence. This response accounted for 43% of the total for families and 31% for individuals.
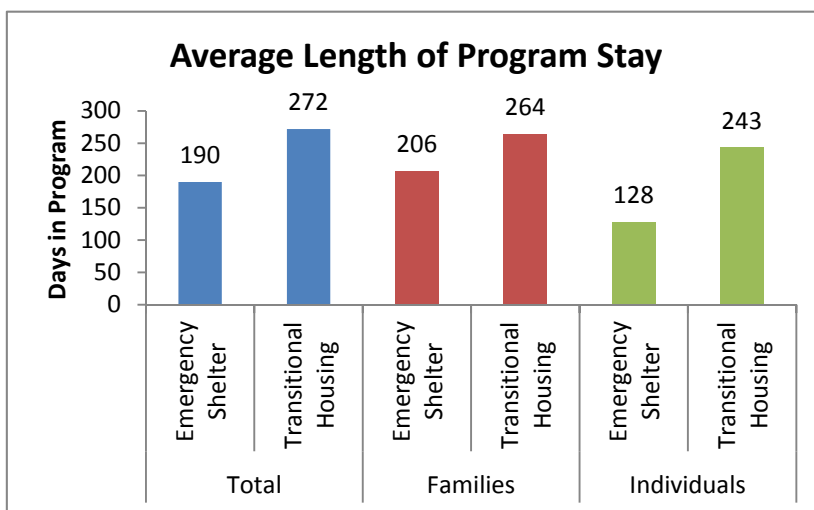

For individuals, this top reason was followed by eviction (17%), release from prison/jail (15%), job income loss/reduction (12%) and drug/alcohol abuse (6%).

For families, this top reason was followed by eviction (24%), domestic violence (11%), job income loss/reduction (7%) and relocation (7%).
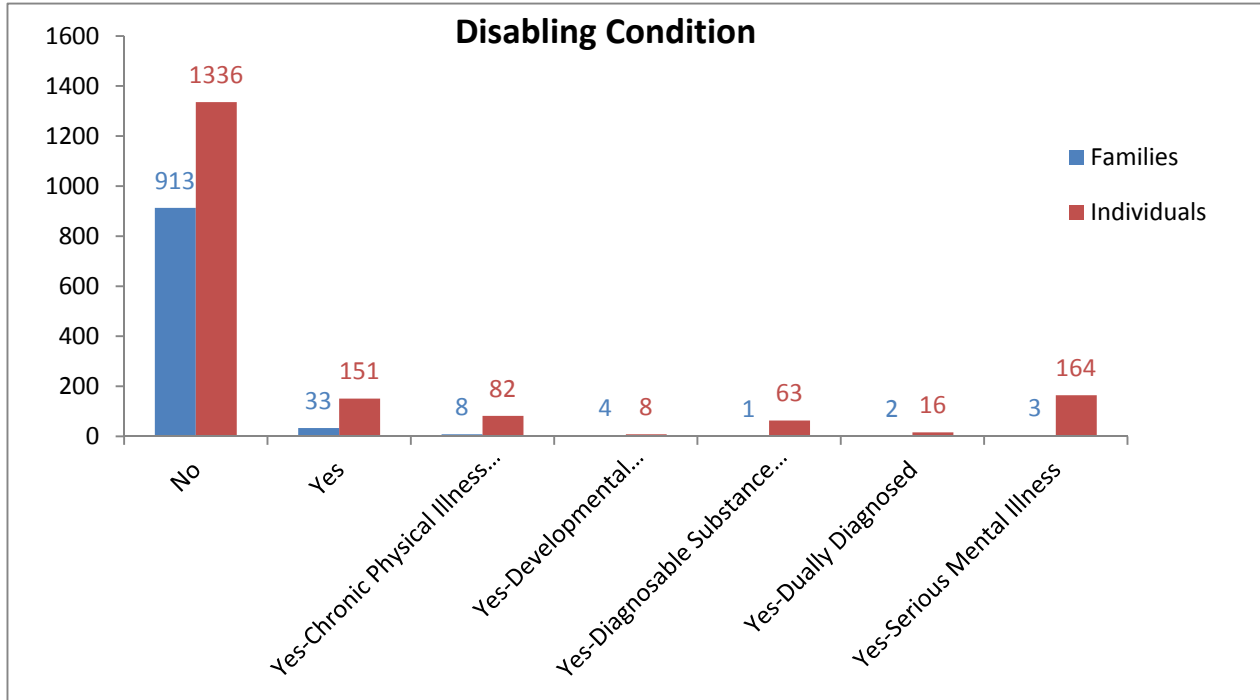
Length of homeless episode prior to program entry. For both families (67%) and individuals (61%), most had become homeless very recently, within a month or less. 85% of families and 79% of individuals indicated their episode of homelessness lasted from 1 day up to 3 months. 3% of families and 9% of individuals reported experiencing homelessness for over a year.

Homelessness Duration

Average Length of Program Stay. On average, families had longer program stays in both emergency shelter and transitional housing as compared to individuals. This difference was most evident for families in emergency shelters, who had stays that were almost twice as long as individuals in emergency shelter.

Average Length of Program Stay

Disabling Condition. 535 persons (16% of total), including children, who were homeless in Southern New Jersey indicated having a disability. 22% of the individuals identified themselves as having a disabling condition compared to only 5% of persons in families.
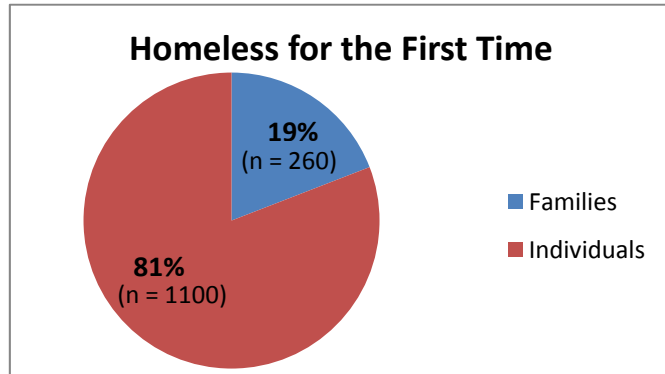

For those indicating a disabling condition, the breakdown was as follows:

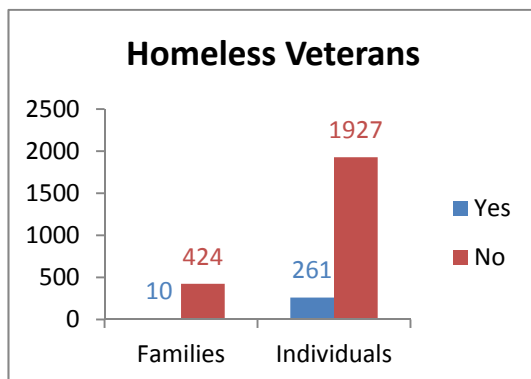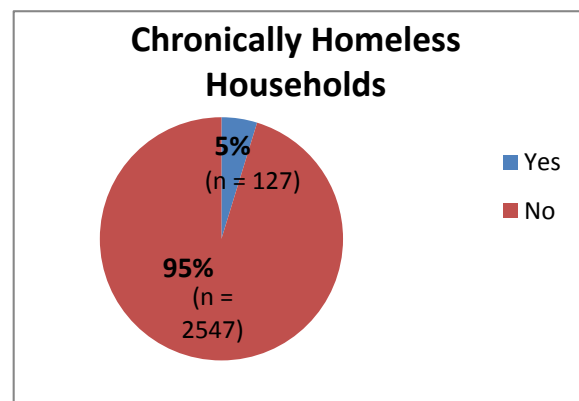| Disabling Condition	Individuals	%	Families	%
Yes	151	31%	33	65%
Yes - Chronic physical illness or disability	82	17%	8	16%
Yes - Developmental disability	8	2%	4	8%
Yes - Diagnosable substance use disorder	63	13%	1	2%
Yes - Dually diagnosed	16	3%	2	4%
Yes - Serious mental illness	164	34%	3	6%
Total	484	100%	51	100%

- 65% of families and 31% of individuals indicated a disabling condition however the specific disability was not provided.
- Among those reporting a disabling condition, the most common condition identified by persons in families was chronic physical illness or disability (16%) and the most common condition identified by individuals was serious mental illness at 34%.
- Of those reporting a disabling condition, 13% of individuals had a diagnosable substance use disorder compared to 2% of persons in families.

Homeless for the first time. A total of 1,360 persons experienced homelessness for the first time during the report period. Individuals experiencing a higher incidence of first-time homelessness (81%) compared to families (19%).
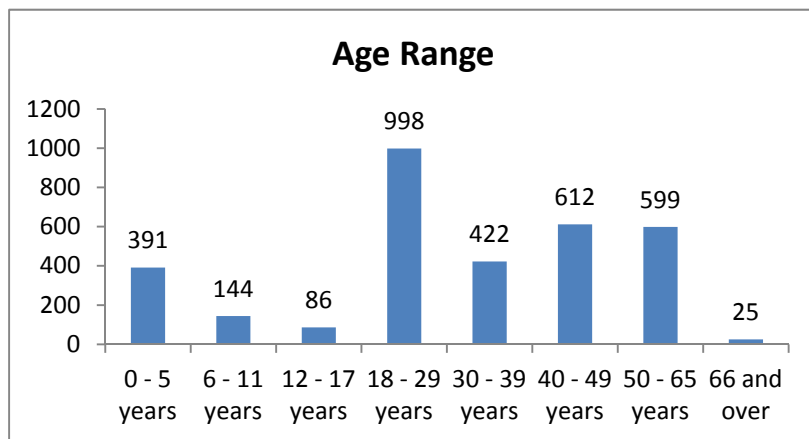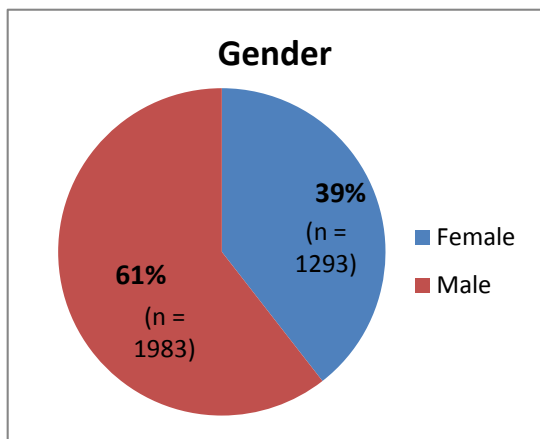
Homeless for the First Time

19%
(n = 260)

81%
(n = 1100)

■ Families
■ Individuals

Chronically Homeless and Veterans. Chronic homelessness is defined as a person with a disabling condition being homeless for 12 months or longer or having 4 episodes of homelessness in 3 years.

Based on HMIS information, 5% (127) of individuals served were identified as chronically homeless. This is significantly lower than national results which indicate the chronically homeless population accounts for 10% of the total homeless population. It should be noted that the chronically homeless in this chart are only individuals. Due to the recent change in the definition, the HMIS system does not yet have the capacity to identify chronically homeless families.

Chronically Homeless Households

5%
(n = 127)

95%
(n = 2547)

■ Yes
■ No

Homeless Veterans

	Families	Individuals
Yes	10	261
No	424	1927

Very few of adults sheltered as part of a family during this report period were identified as veterans (2%). On the other hand, 12% of individual adults accessing emergency shelters and transitional housing were identified as veterans. This is slightly higher than national estimates which indicate homeless veterans account for 11.5% of the total adult homeless population (Veteran Homelessness: A Supplemental Report to the 2010 Annual Homeless Assessment Report).

Gender and Age Range. 61% of homeless persons in Southern New Jersey were male and 39% were female. This is nearly identical to the national trends which indicate homeless males who represent 62.3% of the population and women represent 37.7%. The average age of persons accessing emergency shelter and transitional housing in Southern New Jersey was 24 years old, with almost half of the homeless population under the age of 30. 24% of those persons 30 years or younger were under 6 years of age. 32% of the population was 30-49 years of age and only 19% were 50 years of age and over.

Race and Ethnicity. Most homeless persons reported their race as Black or African American (57%). The next largest racial group was White (36%), followed by Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander (3%). Nationally, Black or African Americans represent 37% of the homeless population and Whites represent 41%. Regarding ethnicity, 87% of homeless persons self-identified their ethnicity as Non-Hispanic/Non-Latino, which is comparable to 83% nationally.