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Somerset County's 2015 Point-In-Time Count of the Homeless

January 27, 2015

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This report was prepared for The New Jersey Housing and Mortgage Finance Agency by Monarch Housing Associates

I. Introduction

NJ Counts 2015

NJ Counts 2015, New Jersey's annual Point-In-Time (PIT) Count of the Homeless, provides a statewide snapshot of homeless households in our communities; where they find shelter, what their needs are, and what factors contribute to making them homeless. The 2015 Count reveals important demographic and other information about families and individuals who were homeless on the night of Tuesday, January 27th, 2015 or Tuesday, February 3rd, 2015 (depending on the community, see limitations below), and was carried out with the help of government agencies, community-based organizations, and local volunteers.

In New Jersey, each County's count is planned, coordinated, and carried out locally, and the information gathered enables each community to better allocate housing resources and services in order to prevent and end homelessness. The PIT Count is the only opportunity throughout the year for most communities to take a comprehensive look at the total homeless population, and is especially crucial in assessing the needs of the unsheltered homeless.

Acknowledgements

Monarch would like to thank all Point-In-Time Coordinators, homeless service providers, agencies, and volunteers who participated in NJ Counts 2015. Monarch would also like to specifically thank Bergen County for providing a Spanish translation of the 2015 paper survey tool.

Finally, a special acknowledgement is given to all the respondents who were willing to share personal information about themselves and their households' experiences in order to help our communities better understand and assist the homeless.

Funding for coordinating New Jersey's 2015 Point-In-Time and producing this report was provided by New Jersey's Housing and Mortgage Finance Agency (NJHMFA).

This Report

The findings in this report are presented in the following sections:

- 1. Total homeless population;
- 2. Those experiencing chronic homelessness (families and individuals that have been homeless for a year or longer, or who have experienced at least four episodes of homelessness in the last three years, and have a disabled head of household); and
- 3. Unsheltered families and individuals:

The structure of this report is intended to provide not only an overall snapshot of the homeless population counted in the Point-In-Time, but also to focus attention on the homeless subpopulations that are the most in need, and those that represent federal funding priorities set forth by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD).

In addition to the main findings presented in the body of this report, Appendix A includes charts illustrating the responses to all survey questions that were part of the 2015 Point-In-Time Count.

II. Data Collection and Methodology

Requirements for the Count

As part of its Continuum of Care (CoC) application for homelessness funding, HUD requires that jurisdictions across the nation conduct a statistically reliable and unduplicated count of the homeless for one overnight period during the last 10 days of January. New Jersev's Continuums of Care (regional networks of organizations, agencies, and community stakeholders that plan local efforts to help the homeless) conduct an annual count of sheltered homeless persons (i.e. persons in emergency shelter, transitional housing for the homeless, and Safe Haven programs) and at least a biennial count of unsheltered homeless persons. 2015 was a HUD-required full count year.

In their Point-In-Time Count, CoCs must count and report all individuals and families who meet the criteria in paragraph (1)(i) of the homeless definition in 24 CFR 91.5 of HUD's Homeless Definition Rule on the night designated for the count. This includes individuals and families who are:

- **Sheltered**, or "living in a supervised publicly or privately operated shelter designated to provide temporary living arrangement (including congregate shelters, transitional housing, and hotels and motels paid for by charitable organizations or by federal, state, or local government programs for low-income individuals)," or
- **Unsheltered**, "with a primary nighttime residence that is a public or private place not designed for or ordinarily used as a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings, including a car, park, abandoned building, bus or train station, airport, or camping ground."

Because this report focuses on those respondents who meet HUD's definition of homeless, it does not include information about those who may be at risk of homelessness, precariously housed, or considered homeless under other federal statutes. Persons who, on the night of the count, were living doubled up with another household, living in illegal or overcrowded units, being discharged from a jail or health facility with no subsequent residence, scheduled to be evicted, or paying for its own motel unit were not considered

homeless. All survey information collected for respondents who were at risk of homelessness or precariously housed was preserved and shared with each community for local planning purposes, but is not included in this report unless otherwise noted.

Data Collection Methods

Monarch Housing Associates provided each of New Jersey's 21 counties with in-person training, online video and print training guides, a practice online survey tool, and technical assistance to aid in the data collection process for New Jersey's 2015 Point-In-Time Count. Point-In-Time Coordinators in each county disseminated PIT training materials and helped facilitate local planning around implementation of the PIT count in their communities.

For the second year, the count of homeless persons who were sheltered on the night of the point in time was primarily taken from New Jersey's Homeless Management Information System (HMIS), while the count for the unsheltered and those sheltered by non-HMIS programs was conducted using a Paper Survey tool, personal interviews, and agency client records. This strategy was designed in accordance with HUD guidance regarding conducting both sheltered and unsheltered Point-In-Time Counts.

The 2015 PIT Survey tool closely mirrors information collected in HMIS so that the data was comparable for important factors such as household characteristics, income, services needed, and factors contributing to homelessness. Agencies updated all HMIS data to accurately reflect the night of the count, and those with programs that were non HMISparticipating submitted information from interviews utilizing the Paper Survey tool through SurveyMonkey.

Limitations

- 1. HUD requires a count of sheltered homeless persons and families annually, but only a biennial count of those who are unsheltered. Even though New Jersey conducts both a sheltered and unsheltered count each year, the comprehensiveness of the unsheltered count may be influenced during the non-HUD required full count years. This report includes comparison data from 2011 to 2015. 2012 and 2014 were not HUD required full reporting years while 2011, 2013 and 2015 were.
- 2. The winter of 2014 to 2015 was particularly cold, with parts of New Jersey seeing significant snow accumulation. NJ Counts 2015 was originally scheduled to take place Tuesday, January 27th, 2015. Unfortunately, there was a blizzard predicted for the night of the PIT, which led to about half of the Counties in the State postponing the PIT activities to the following week, Tuesday, February 3rd, 2015. This weather led to half the communities counting the households that were homeless on the night of January 27th and the other half counting those that were homeless on the night of February 3rd. Besides leaving the date of the count inconsistent, this winter weather forced many communities to set up emergency warming stations or shelters for the unsheltered.

While this means that many more people are able to sleep in a warm place, it may skew Point-In-Time data to show fewer unsheltered households than are actually present in communities on a regular basis.

- 3. The information presented in this report is based on survey interviews and agency HMIS records. In some cases, survey respondents did not answer every question completely, and homeless provider agencies did not report all client information on the night of the count. For this reason, all charts presented in this report will be based on the responses received, while all percentages will be based on the total households or individuals served and may not equal 100% in each category due to possible missing data.
- 4. Because the Point-In-Time Count represents only one night during the last ten days of January, it is widely accepted that the PIT will undercount the overall homeless population. Undercounting may occur due to difficulty finding those living on the street, incomplete information for people who do not agree to complete the survey, a shortage of volunteers to cover a geographic area, or homeless persons choosing not to seek housing services on the night of the count. This data should not be viewed as a comprehensive measurement of all families and individuals who experience homelessness throughout the year, but rather as a minimum number of persons who experience homelessness in New Jersey on a given night.

De-duplication

Monarch Housing Associates collected and merged all HMIS and SurveyMonkey Point-In-Time data from each community into its combined database. Monarch generated two unique identifiers, one more general and one more in-depth, based on the identifying information for each individual record. Using a formula, these unique identifiers were compared to all identifiers for other records in the database to identify potential duplicates.

All duplicates detected through comparison of unique identifiers were then de-duplicated by the following process:

- 1. Multiple HMIS records where all fields match a single record was preserved, and all duplicates were removed;
- 2. Multiple SurveyMonkey records where all fields match a single record was preserved, and all duplicates were removed;
- 3. Comparing HMIS to SurveyMonkey records where unique identifiers, disabilities, income sources, household size, and location on the night of the count all match the HMIS record was preserved and the SurveyMonkey duplicates were removed.

Following this de-duplication of the data, communities were given preliminary data to review all identified duplicates and records with missing data. Communities were then able to update records with missing information and/or request any additional deduplication they determined prudent. Monarch then updated and removed additional records based on community feedback prior to completing its final analysis and report.

III. Findings for Total Homeless Population

Key Findings

- On the night of January 27th, 2015 a total of 279 households, including 342 persons, were experiencing homelessness in Somerset County, according to the 2015 Point-In-Time Count.
- A total of 33 households, with 34 persons, were identified as chronically homeless.
- 5 unsheltered homeless persons were counted.

Total Homeless Population

On the night of January 27th, 2015, a total of 342 persons, in 279 households, were experiencing homelessness in Somerset County, according to the 2015 Point-In-Time Count. This is an increase of 19 persons (5.9%) and 28 households (11.2%) from 2014. Somerset County had 3.3% of New Jersey's statewide homeless population in 2015.

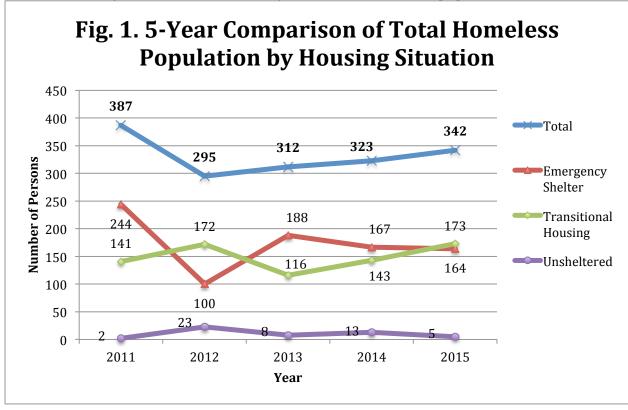


Figure 1 shows that, in 2015, 164 homeless persons stayed in emergency shelters, 173 stayed in transitional housing, and 5 were living unsheltered on the night of the count. The total number of those counted in emergency shelters was a reduction of 3 persons from 2014. However, there were 30 (21%) more persons in transitional housing, and the number living unsheltered decreased by 8 persons when compared to 2014.

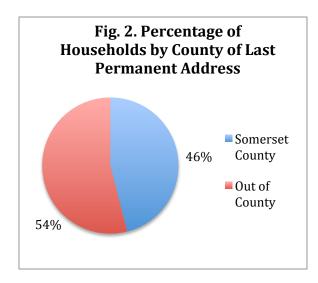


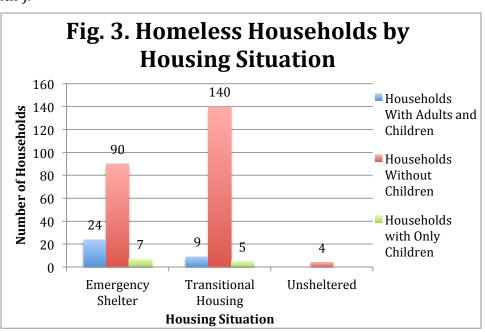
Figure 1 also shows that, over the past five years, the total number of homeless persons has been fluctuating in Somerset County, with the highest count in 2011 (387). Yet, over the four-year period from 2012 to 2015, the number of homeless persons has consistently increased, showing an increase of 47 persons (15.9%) from 2012 to 2015.

As Figure 2 shows, 54% of homeless households in Somerset County reported that their last permanent address prior to becoming homeless was outside of the county.

Homeless Families and Individuals

When reading the data regarding different types of homeless households, it is important for the reader to remember that, in this report, 'household' means "any group of persons who, if they were able to attain permanent housing, would choose to live together; and, shared the same sleeping arrangements on the night of the count." Three different types of households are discussed below: households with adults and children under 18 ('families'), households without children ('individuals'), and households with only children under 18 ('unaccompanied youth').

Of 279 the homeless households counted in Somerset County 2015. in 33 (11.8%)were families with at least child one under the age of 18 and one adult. This represents 1 less homeless family from 2014. These families included 95 persons. children under age



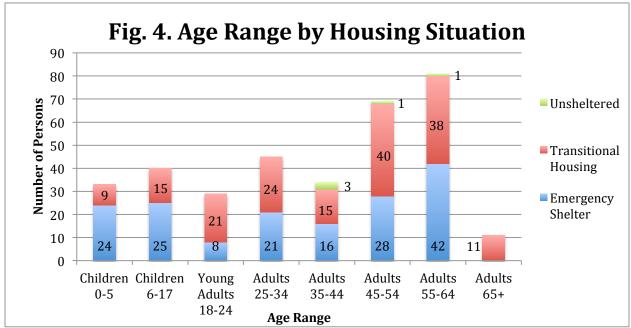
18, and 34 adults. The average family size was 2.9 persons. Figure 3 shows that 24 families (72.7%) were staying in emergency shelter, and 9 (27.3%) were in transitional housing on the night of the count. There were no unsheltered families in Somerset County on the night of the count.

83.9% (234) of the homeless households counted in Somerset County were households without children under 18, and they were composed of 235 adult individuals. 90 (38.5%) of these adult-only households were staying in emergency shelters, 140 (59.8%) were in transitional housing, and 4 (1.7%) were unsheltered. Somerset County has seen the number of adult-only households increase by 22 (10.4%) since 2014.

As Figure 3 indicates, there were 12 youth only households reported in 2015, an increase of 4 from 2014. All of these households were one-child households. 7 unaccompanied youth were staying in emergency shelters, and 5 were in transitional housing on the night of the count.

Demographics

The majority (240 persons, 70.2%) of those experiencing homelessness in Somerset County on the night of the count were adults over age 24. There were a total of 29 (8.5%) homeless young adults between 18 and 24 years old, and 73 (21.3%) children under 18 years old as well. Figure 4 shows that the majority of homeless children who were under the age of 18 were between 6 and 17 years of age (40, 54.8%). The age range most represented, with 81 persons and 23.7% of the total homeless population, was adults between 55 and 64.

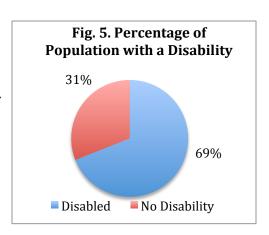


62.6% of homeless persons were male, and 37.4% were female.

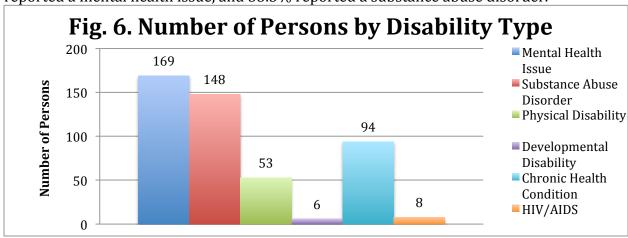
48.5% of homeless persons identified their race as Black or African American, making that the largest racial subgroup of homeless persons reported. The next largest group self-identified as White (43.9%), followed by those identifying as Asian (3.8%). With regard to ethnicity, 10.5% of persons identified themselves as Hispanic.

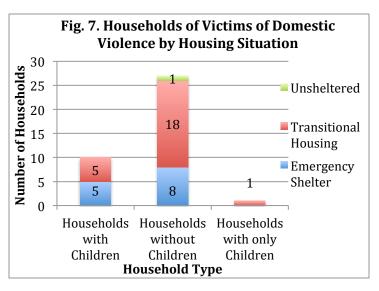
Disabilities

Figure 5 illustrates that 69% of homeless persons reported having some type of disability. 82.2% of adults 18 or older reported some type of disability compared to 20.5% of children. Figure 6 shows the number of the homeless persons that identified as having various disabilities. The most prevalent disabilities were mental health issues, substance abuse disorders, and chronic health conditions.



Among disabled adults, 72% reported mental health issues making this the most prevalent disability; representing 59.1% of the total adult homeless population. 64.7% of disabled adults reported a substance abuse disorder. Among disabled homeless children, 66.7% reported a mental health issue, and 33.3% reported a substance abuse disorder.





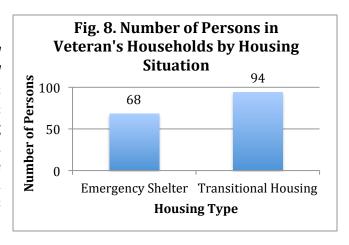
Victims of Domestic Violence

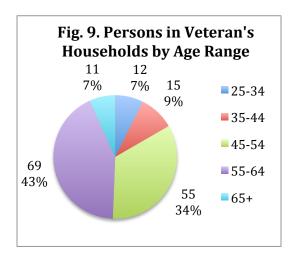
On the night of the count, in Somerset County, 38 homeless households reported having a victim of domestic violence. Figure 7 shows that the majority (71.5%) of these households were adult-only. individual households. 10 (26.3%) were families with at least 1 adult and 1 child under the of 18. (2.6%)age unaccompanied homeless youth also reported being a victim. 34.2% of domestic violence households were in emergency shelters, while 63.2% were

in transitional housing. Only 1 domestic violence household was unsheltered on the night of the count.

Veterans

In its plan, Opening Doors: Federal Strategic Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness, States the United Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH) has prioritized ending homelessness among veterans by 2015. Many communities in New Jersey have been working hard to homelessness among our country's servicemen and women.





162 homeless veterans were counted on the night of the count, 21 more (14.9%) than 2014. All were members of adult-only households. The largest contingent of homeless veterans was staying in transitional housing (58%). In addition, 68 were in emergency shelter (42%). There were 0 unsheltered veterans.

95.1% of all veterans experiencing homelessness in Somerset County were male, and 4.9% were female. The most common racial background identified among veterans (58.6%) was Black or African-American, while (38.9%) identified as

White. Figure 9 illustrates the percentage of homeless veterans by age range.

6 homeless veterans reported being victims of domestic violence. 145 of the 162, 89.5%, reported having some kind of disability. The most common disabilities cited among these were mental health issues (64.2%) and substance abuse issues (61.7%). The top two types of services that homeless veterans sought were housing and veterans services, which were both reported by 13% of veterans each. 1.2% of veterans were connected with VA pensions while 29.6% were connected with VA disability benefits. 75.3% of veterans were

connected to VA healthcare benefits.

Income and Benefits

Among all households experiencing homelessness on the night of the count, 28.7% had no source of income, and 18.3% reported receiving some form of earned income. The most common source of cash income among homeless households after earned income was Veteran's Disability (17.9%).

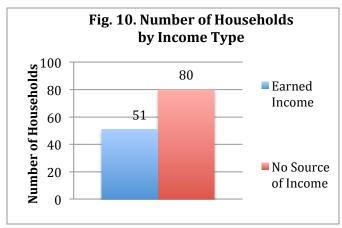


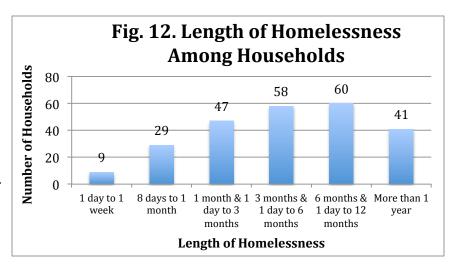
Figure 11 shows the average monthly income for all homeless households.

| Figure 11. Average Monthly Income For Households by Housing Situation | | | | |
|---|-------------------|----------------------|-------------|--|
| | Emergency Shelter | Transitional Housing | Unsheltered | |
| Average for All Households | \$578.56 | \$1,199.93 | \$433.33 | |

7.5% of households reported that their household was receiving no kind of non-cash benefit on the night of the count. Benefits from the Department of Veterans' Affairs were the top reported non-cash benefits, and were received by 43.7% of households. 37.6% were also receiving Food Stamps, or the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), and 30.1% were connected to Medicaid benefits.

Length of Homelessness

Figure 12 shows the range lengths of homeless episodes experienced on the night of the count by households in Somerset County. 60 households (21.5%)reported that their most recent. continuous episode homelessness had lasted 6 months and 1 day to 12 months. The trend seen in Figure 12 is slightly

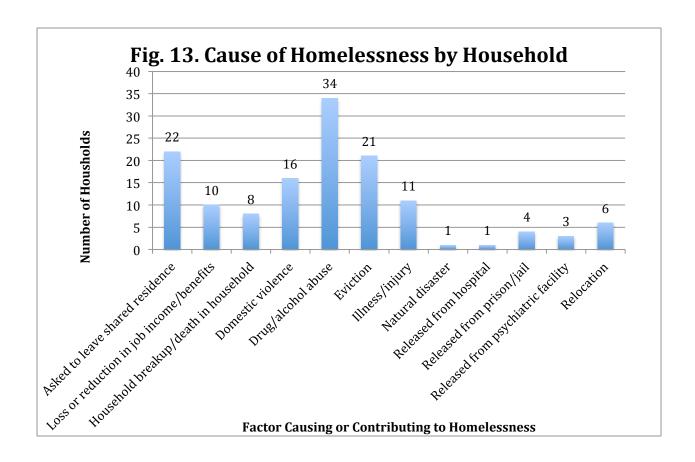


different than 2014, where the largest grouping of households (27.9%) reported being homeless for more than a year.

Cause of Homelessness

When asked to share the primary factor that contributed to, or caused, their homelessness, more households attributed their homelessness to drug or alcohol abuse (34 households, 12.2%) than any other cause. As Figure 13 shows, the other common factors reported were being asked to leave a shared residence (7.9%), eviction (7.5%) and domestic violence (5.7%).

When homeless households were asked 'what was your residence prior to your current living situation?' more said they were staying or living with friends or family (20.1%) than any other type of residence. 17.9% reported residing in transitional housing projects, and 14.3% reported residing in an emergency shelter prior to their current living situation.



IV. Findings for the Chronically Homeless

Someone with a long-term disabling condition, who has been continually homeless for a year or more, or at least four times in the past three years, meets HUD's definition of chronically homeless. Any family with one adult that meets this definition is considered a chronically homeless family.

HUD currently has a goal of ending chronic homelessness by 2017. This goal reflects the urgency of helping to house those persons who have not been able to remain stably housed over the course of an extended period of time. Chronically Homeless persons are among the most vulnerable homeless groups, and providing effective supportive services and case management may be required in order to help some stay in the housing they need. Prioritization of new Continuum of Care funding opportunities has recently been giving some communities in New Jersey new resources for housing this subgroup.

Total Chronically Homeless Population

33 households, made up of 34 total persons, were chronically homeless in Somerset County, according to the 2015 Point-In-Time Count. This is an increase of 20 persons from 2014. The rate of chronic homelessness as a percentage of overall homelessness increased from 4.3% in 2014 to 9.9%.

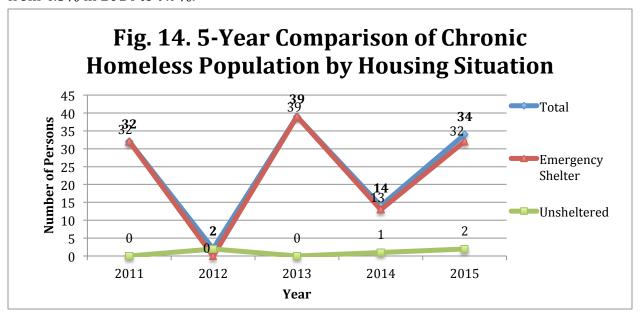
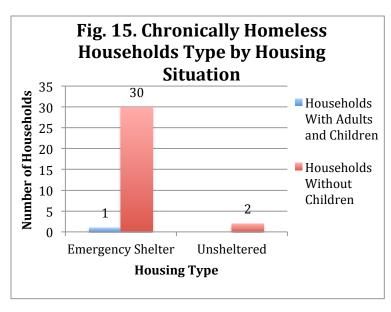


Figure 14 shows the number of chronically homeless persons who were in emergency shelter or living unsheltered in Somerset County from 2011 to 2015. Over the past five years, the overall number of chronically homeless persons has fluctuated depending on the count year, but has trended up overall by 2 persons. The number of unsheltered chronically homeless persons also fluctuated during this time, but is up by 2 since 2011.

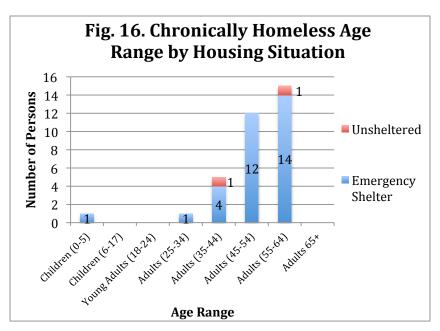
Families and Individuals

Of the 33 chronically homeless households counted in Somerset County in 2015, only 1 household with 1 adult and 1 child was counted, an increase from the 0 counted in 2014. This 1 family household was served in an emergency shelter project. The remaining 32 households were individual adult households. 93.8% of these households were served in emergency shelters on the night of the count.



Demographics

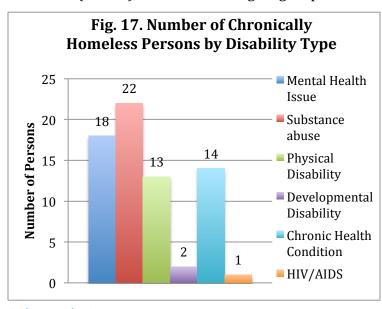
Of the 34 total chronically homeless persons, the large maiority (97.1%)adults over the age of 24. Only 1 person was under 18 (2.9%). The age range with the highest concentration of chronically homeless persons adults was between 55 and 64 years old, which had 15 persons (44.1%).



85.3% of those counted as

chronically homeless were male, and 14.7% were female.

The largest racial subgroup of homeless persons reported their race as Black or African - American (61.8%), and the next largest group self-identified as White (35.3%).



Disabilities

In order to meet the definition of chronically homeless, at least one adult in each household must have some kind of disability. The disabilities most commonly identified were substance abuse disorders (66.7%) and mental health (54.5%).issues The complete numbers of reported disabilities among the chronically homeless can be seen in Figure 17.

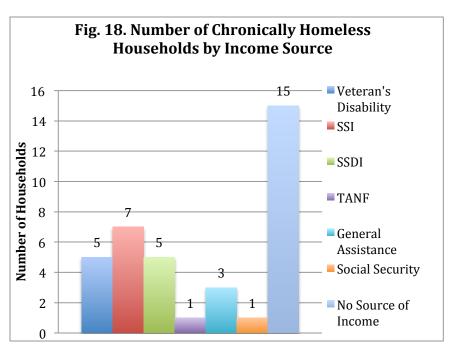
Subpopulations

On the night of the count, 4 chronically homeless households in Somerset County reported being victims of domestic violence (12.1%). 1 was a family household, and all 4 were staying in emergency shelters on the night of the count.

There were 22 (66.7%) chronically homeless veterans identified on the night of the count. All were staying in emergency shelter projects.

Income and Benefits

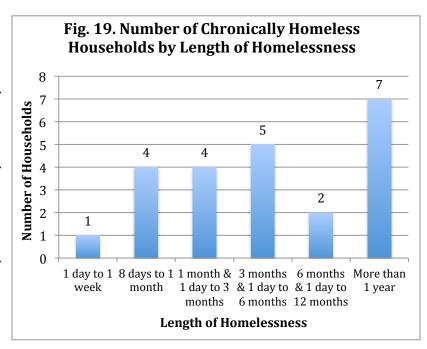
Among all chronically homeless households on the night of the count, 45.4% reported receiving no type of cash income. Figure 18 shows of sources income The received. most common source of cash income among chronically homeless households was SSI, which was received by 21.2%. No households reported receiving earned income.



12.1% of chronically homeless households reported they were not receiving any type of non-cash benefit on the night of the count. VA Benefits was the top reported non-cash benefit among the chronically homeless, with 33.3% of households receiving this benefit.

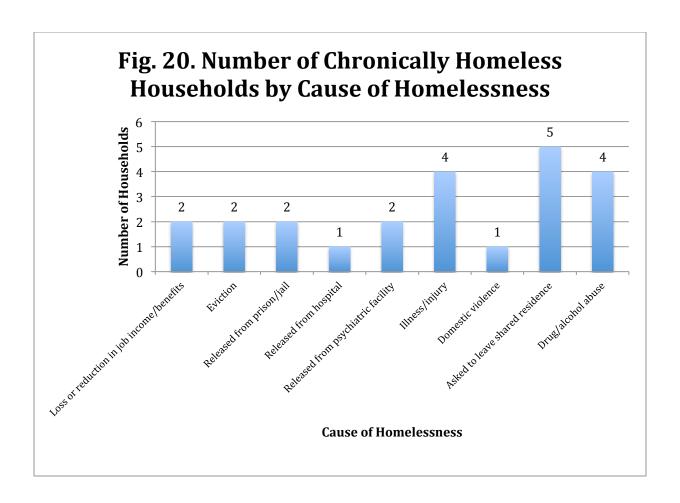
Length of Homelessness

Figure 19 shows that the largest grouping of chronically homeless households (7, 21.1%) reported their most recent, continuous episode homelessness had lasted for more than 1 year. This is a shift from 2014 in which the majority of households reported their length of homelessness lasted less than 3 months.



Cause of Homelessness

When asked to share the primary factor that contributed to, or caused, their homelessness, 15.2% of chronically homeless households cited being asked to leave a shared residence as the primary cause.



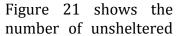
V. Findings for the Unsheltered Homeless

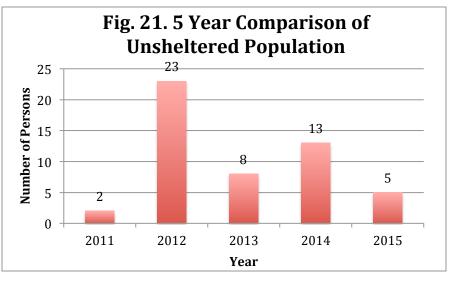
HUD's definition of "unsheltered homeless" applies to any individual or family "with a primary nighttime residence that is a public or private place not designed for or ordinarily used as a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings, including a car, park, abandoned building, bus or train station, airport, or camping ground."

Unsheltered homeless individuals and families are among those with the most critical housing needs in a community. The unsheltered are especially vulnerable in the cold weather and the elements, which are in evidence at the end of January when the Count takes place. The Point-In-Time survey can play an important role in helping communities understand why some of the homeless remain unsheltered, and who is included in this group.

Total Unsheltered Homeless Population

4 households, made up of 5 persons, were living unsheltered in Somerset County, according to the 2015 Point-In-Time Count. This is a decrease of 5 households (55.6%), and 8 persons (61.5%) from 2014.



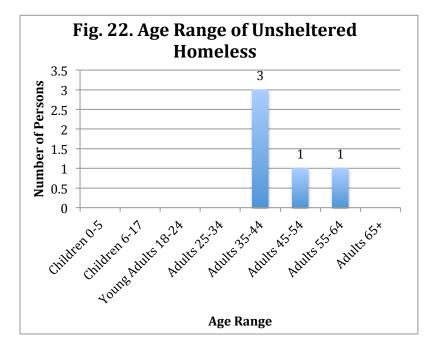


respondents from 2011 to 2015. While the numbers have fluctuated over the years, there has been a significant drop in unsheltered homelessness from 2012 (18 persons, 78.3%).

Families and Individuals

There was 0 unsheltered households with children in 2015, a decrease from the 1 unsheltered family counted in 2014.

Of the 4 unsheltered adult only households counted, 3 were individual adults and 1 was a household composed of 2 adults.



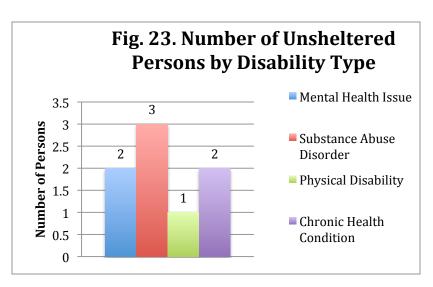
Demographics

Similar to 2014, the largest portion of the 5 unsheltered persons counted in 2015, 60%, was between 35 and 44 years old.

Most of the unsheltered persons were male (80%) and only 1 was female. 80% identified their race as White and 20% identified as Black or African-American. None of the unsheltered persons identified themselves as Hispanic.

Disabilities

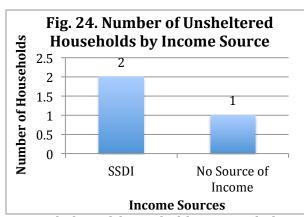
of the 5 unsheltered (80%)persons reported having some disability. The disability most commonly identified was substance abuse disorders (3 persons, 75%). The complete numbers of reported disabilities among the unsheltered can be seen in Figure 23.



Subpopulations

On the night of the count, 1 unsheltered homeless person in Somerset County reported being a victim of domestic violence.

There were 0 unsheltered veterans on the night of the count, a decrease of 2 from 2014.



Income and Benefits

Among all unsheltered households on the night of the count, 1 (25%) reported having no source of cash income. The average monthly income reported among unsheltered households was approximately \$433. 50% of unsheltered households reported receiving SSDI, as Figure 24 shows.

No unsheltered households responded to the question about mainstream benefits in the 2015 Point in Time Count.

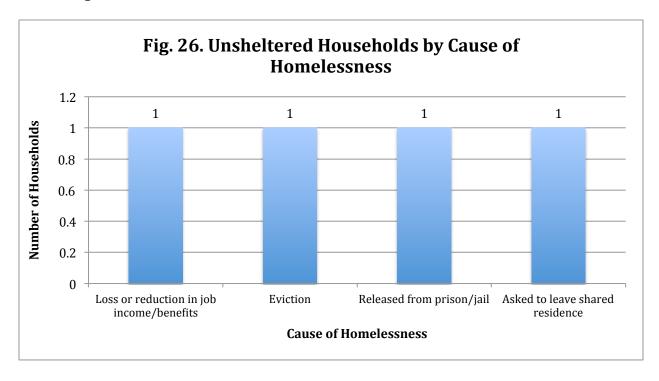
Length of Homelessness

As shown in Figure 25, all unsheltered households reported different lengths of their most recent, continuous episode of homelessness.



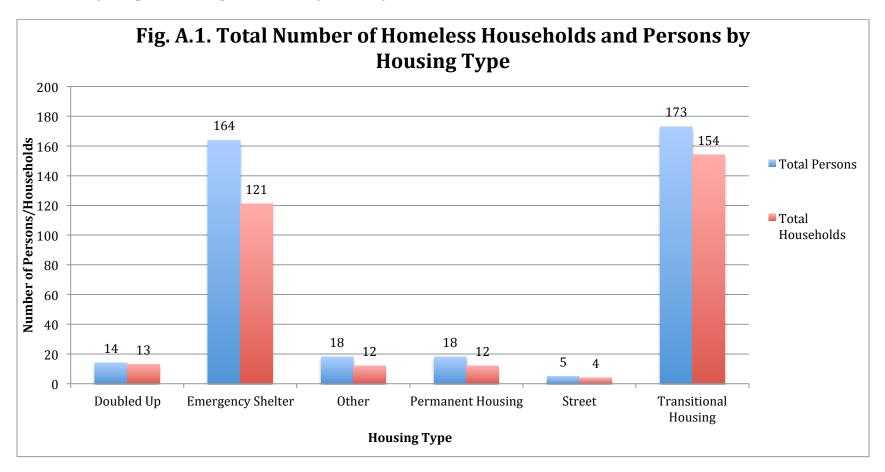
Cause of Homelessness

When asked to share the primary factor that contributed to, or caused, their homelessness, all 4 unsheltered households reported different factors that led to their homelessness, as seen in Figure 26.

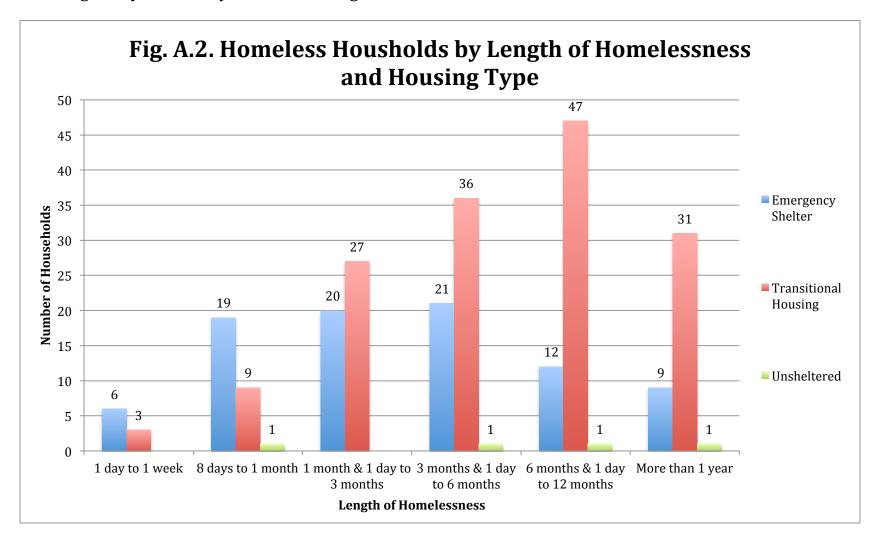


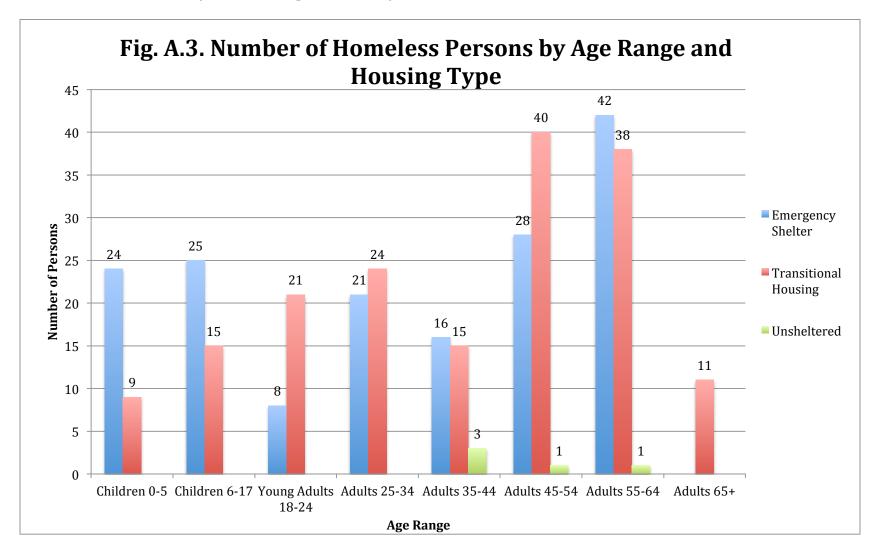
VI. Appendix

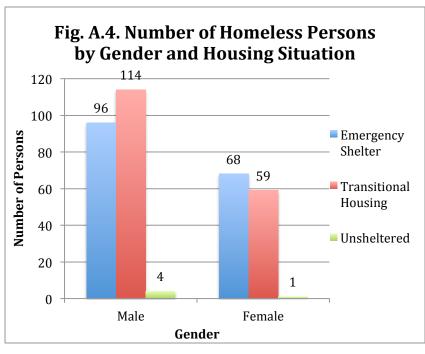
Where did you spend the night of Tuesday, January 27, 2015?

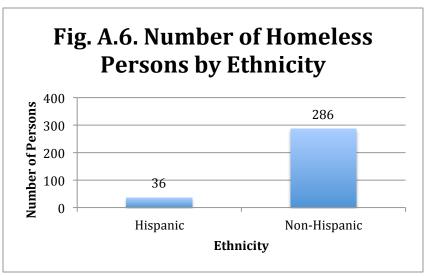


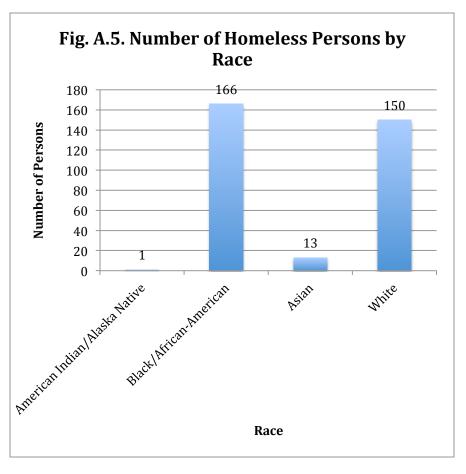
How long have you been in your current living situation?

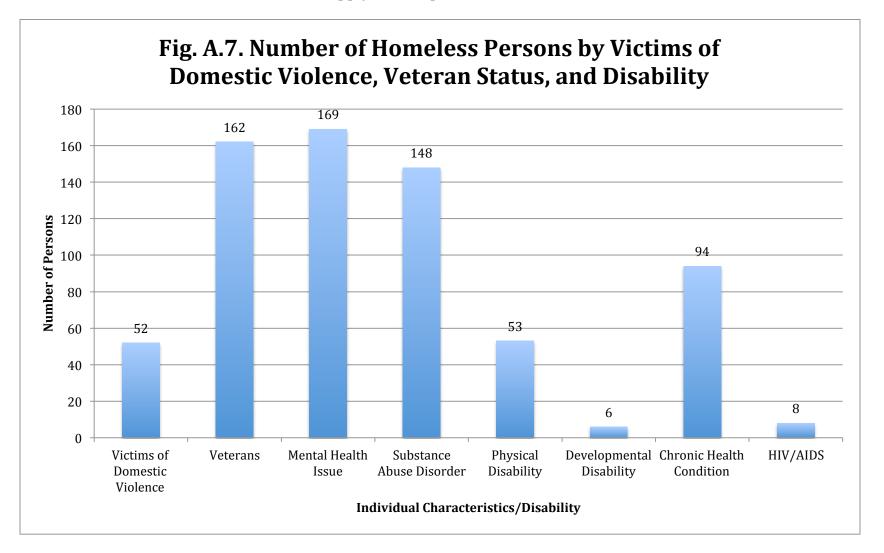








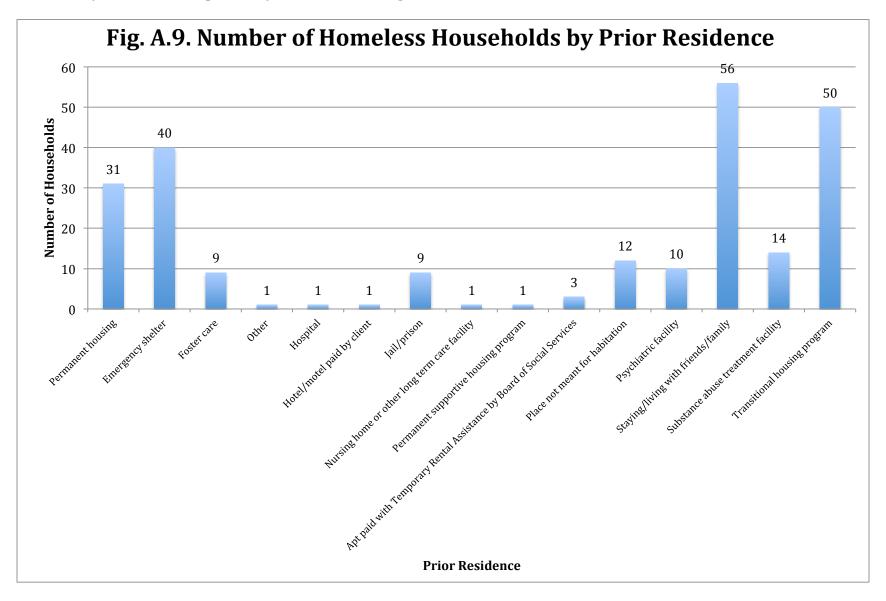




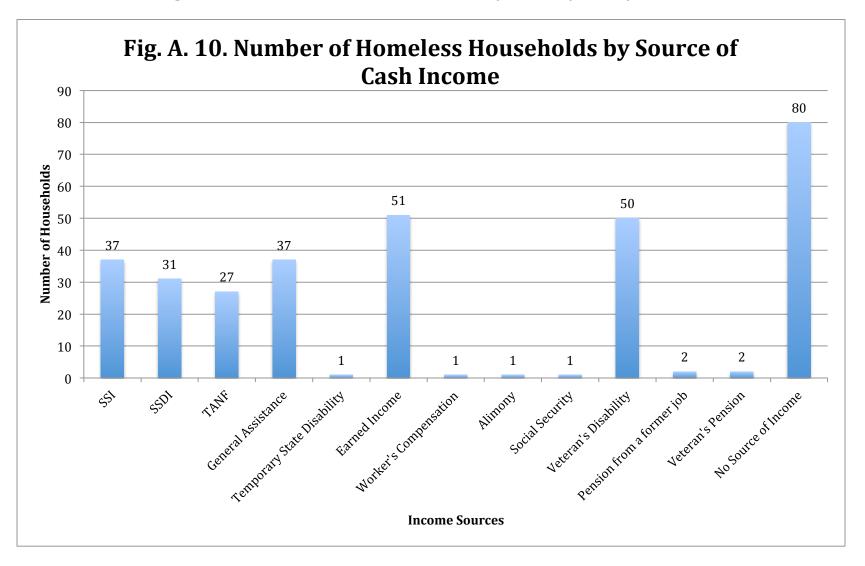
Where was your last permanent address before becoming homeless?

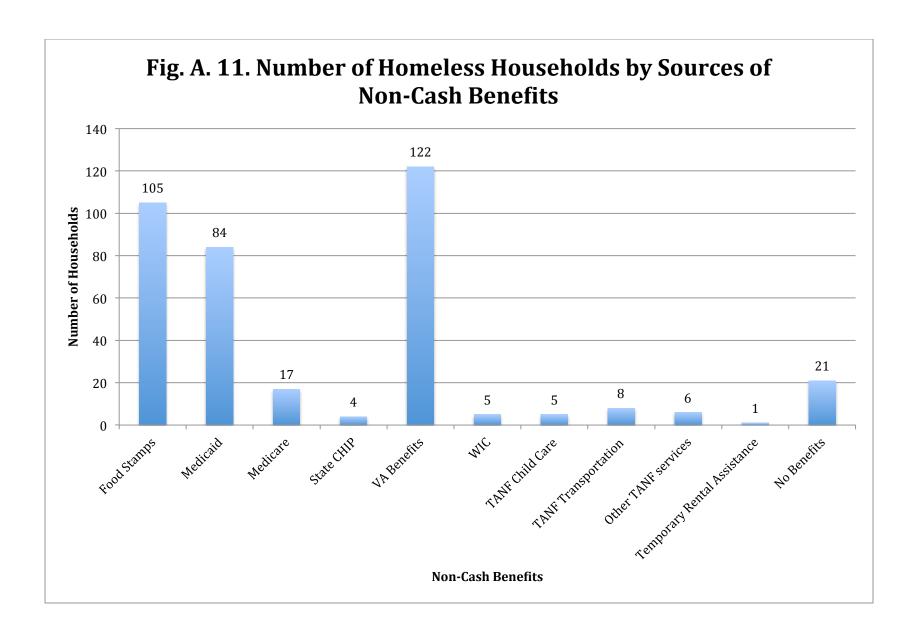
| Fig. A.8. Number of Homeless Households by County, State or Country of Last Permanent Address | | |
|--|----------------------|--|
| Last Permanent Address - County/State | Number of Households | |
| Atlantic County | 1 | |
| Bergen County | 2 | |
| Burlington County | 2 | |
| Colorado | 1 | |
| Essex County | 10 | |
| Georgia | 1 | |
| Gloucester County | 1 | |
| Hudson County | 1 | |
| Hunterdon County | 1 | |
| Maryland | 1 | |
| Mercer County | 6 | |
| Middlesex County | 10 | |
| Monmouth County | 4 | |
| Morris County | 8 | |
| New York | 2 | |
| Ocean County | 9 | |
| Passaic County | 3 | |
| Pennsylvania | 3 | |
| Somerset County | 69 | |
| South Carolina | 1 | |
| Sussex County | 1 | |
| Union County | 12 | |
| Warren County | 1 | |

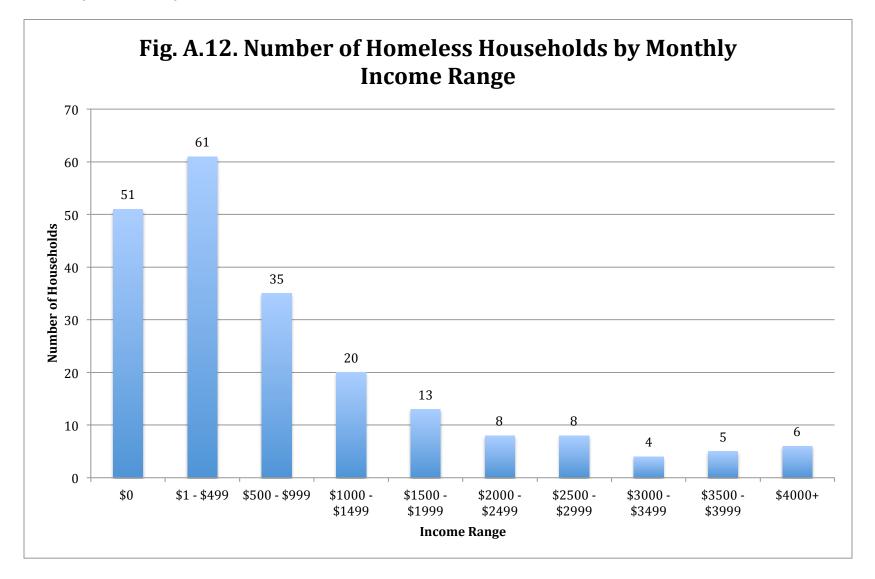
What was your residence prior to your current living situation?



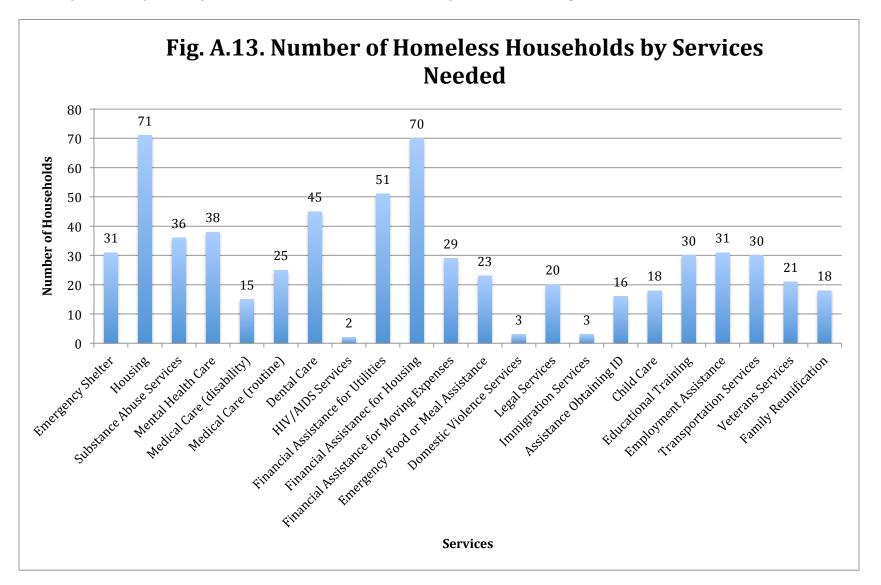
Which of the following sources of income or non-cash benefits do you, or anyone in your household, receive?







Would you, or anyone in your household, like to receive any of the following services?



What was the primary factor that contributed to, or caused, your current living situation?

