



Mercer County Homeless Assessment Report

2015

I. Introduction

In 2012, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development released the Homeless Emergency Assistance and Rapid Transition to Housing (HEARTH) Interim rules. These interim regulations require a high level of planning and coordination among all Continuums of Care (CoCs) throughout the Country. As with any planning process, data analysis of the needs and outcomes of the current system is essential to facilitate meaningful planning.

In order to assist the Continuums of Care throughout New Jersey with this data analysis, this report uses information from the Homeless Management Information Systems (HMIS) used in New Jersey to provide a snapshot of the characteristics of homeless households that were served throughout the State. This report can serve as the foundation of a more in depth review of the population and its needs.

II. Data Source

This Homeless Assessment Report for Mercer County analyzed data from the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) administered by the New Jersey Housing and Mortgage Finance Agency (NJHMFA), the HMIS Lead Agency for the CoC. The projects included in this report were all Emergency Shelter, Transitional Housing and Safe Haven projects (if available in the community) that were classified as “Homeless Only”.

The Homeless Assessment Report is based on information about unduplicated homeless families and individuals who used available emergency shelter, transitional housing and safe haven projects during the yearlong reporting period January 1, 2015 – December 31, 2015, as reported in HMIS.

For purposes of this report, families included any persons that presented together at the HMIS participating project and would choose to be permanently housed together if that was an option. This can include, households with adults and children under the age of 18, households made of all adults, or unaccompanied youth (under age 18) that present together.

III. Findings for Total Population Served

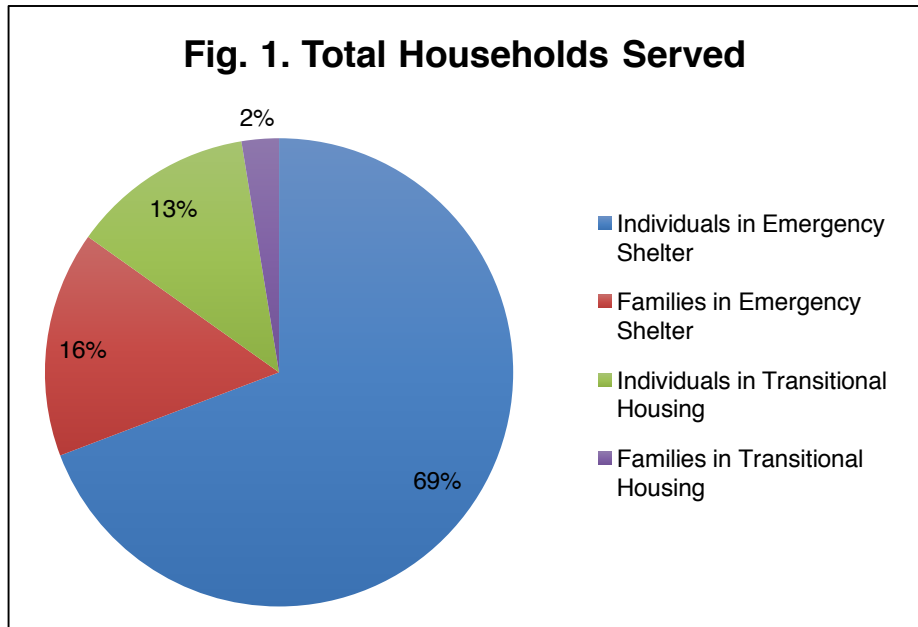
Key Findings:

- A total of 1,865 households were served in HMIS participating emergency shelter and transitional housing projects during the January 1, 2015 – December 31, 2015 period
- There were 165 households identified as chronically homeless during this reporting period
- 54% of all adults served either as individuals or as part of a family identified having a disabling condition
- 61% of households moved on to permanent destinations after discharge

Total Homeless Population.

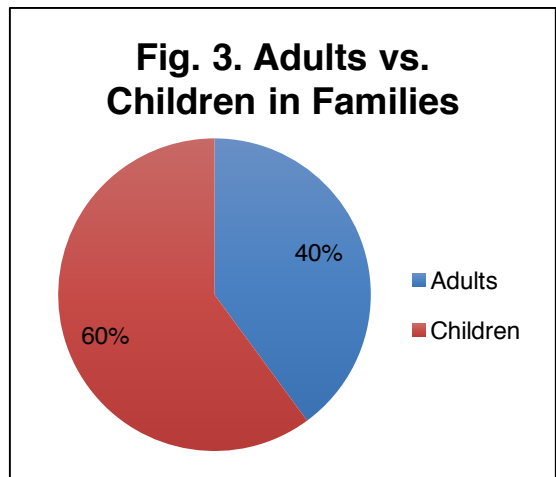
A total of 1,865 households composed of 2,443 persons were housed in Mercer County CoC HMIS participating emergency shelter or transitional housing projects during the January 1, 2015 – December 31, 2015 reporting period. This is a 10% decrease in the total number of households served from 2014 and a 6% decrease from the 2,604

persons served in 2014. Out of the households served in 2015, the large majority, 82% (1,526) were individuals, while the remaining 18% (339 households) were families. As shown in Figure 1, the most served population was individuals in emergency shelter projects, which accounted for 69% of the total population.



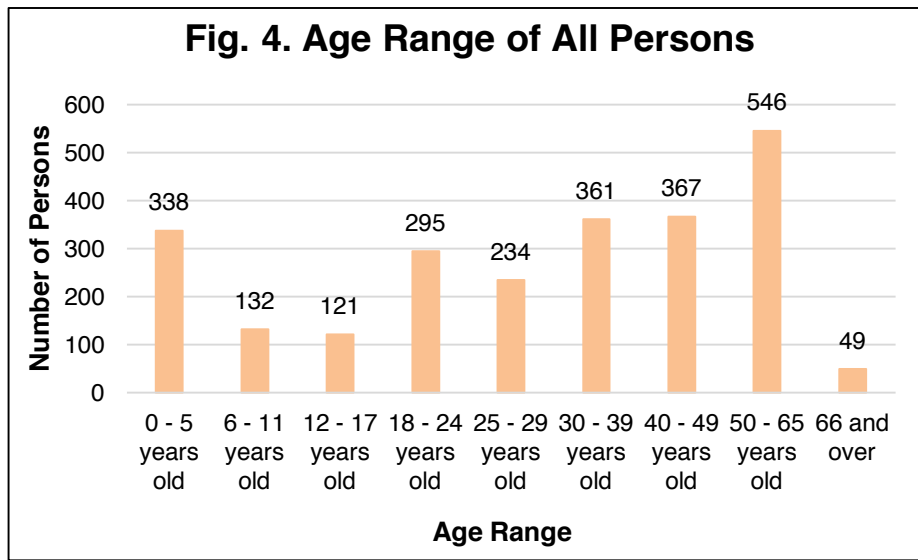
	Mercer County	New Jersey
Total Persons Served	2,443	24,519
Emergency Shelter	2,057	20,337
Individuals	1,291	13,108
Families	766	7,229
Transitional Housing	386	4,134
Individuals	235	2,116
Families	151	2,018

Family Composition. Of the 339 family households served throughout Mercer County in 2015, 332 (98%) were households with adults and children under 18, while the remaining 7 (2%) were adult only households. As shown in Figure 3, children represented 60% of the persons included in adult and children families. The average size of a homeless family in 2015 was 3 and the average age of a child served between the two project types was 6 years old.





Demographics. Of the total homeless population that was served in Mercer County CoC during 2015, the largest percent, 24%, of persons were children under the age of 18. As Figure 4 shows, the next highest age range served was persons between the ages of 50 and 65, which represented 22% of the total population.

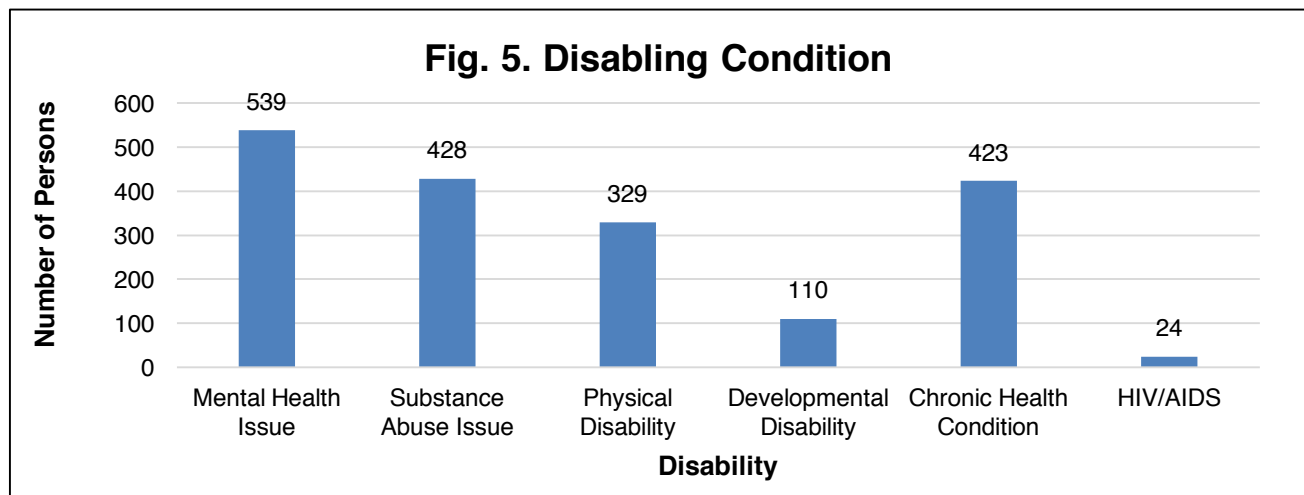


Similar to the 2014 numbers, more than half (60%) of the homeless persons served in Mercer County HMIS participating projects were male, with women representing 40% of the population.

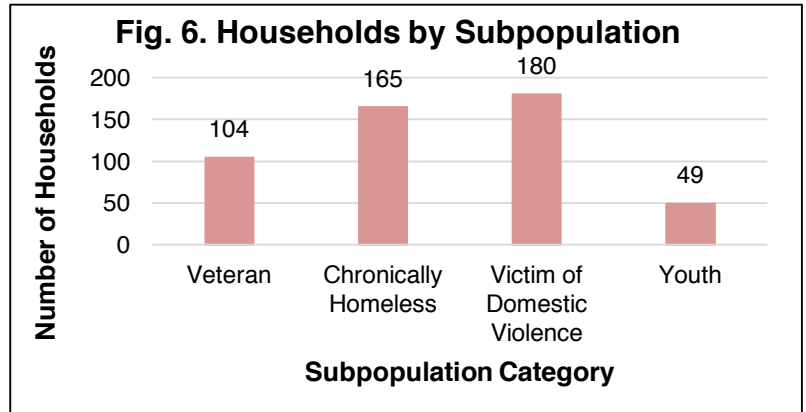
In addition, 68% of the homeless persons served during 2015 identified their race as Black or African American, making that the largest racial subgroup. The next largest was White (30%), followed by American Indian or Alaskan Native with 1%. With regards to ethnicity, 13% identified themselves as Hispanic/Latino.

Disabling Conditions. Among all persons served throughout Mercer County’s HMIS emergency shelter and transitional housing projects, 43% identified having a disabling condition, this number includes 54% of adults and 10% of children.

Among disabled adults, 52% reported a mental health issue, making this the most prevalent disability; representing 28% of the total adult homeless population. 43% of disabled adults also reported a substance abuse issue. Among disabled children, 50% reported a developmental disability. Another 31% of disabled children reported a chronic health condition.

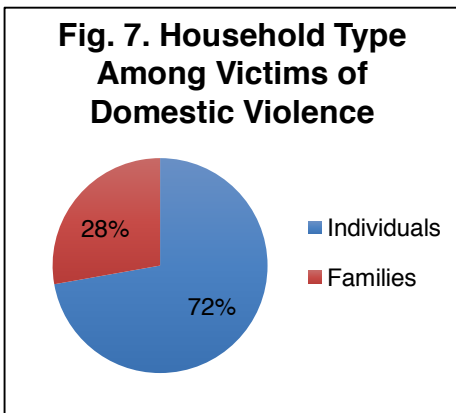


Subpopulation Characteristics. In its plan, Opening Doors: Federal Strategic Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness, the United States Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH) has prioritized ending youth, veteran and chronic homelessness across the Country. In 2015, Mercer County CoC projects served a total of 165 households that were identified as chronically homeless, a 33% decrease from the 247 chronically homeless households served in 2014. 88% of the chronic households served in 2015 were in emergency shelters (4 were families). The remaining 12% were individuals served in transitional housing.



There were 49 individual youth only households, households without someone over age 18, served in Mercer County HMIS emergency shelter projects in 2015.

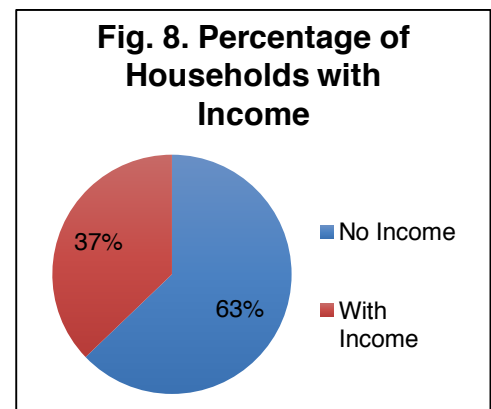
As far as veterans served, Mercer County projects served a total of 104 veterans throughout 2015. 98% of veterans served were individuals and 12% were female. 93% of the veterans served were served in emergency shelter projects. 71% of veterans reported having some kind of disability, with the most common disability reported being a chronic health condition (54%).



In addition to the chronic, youth and veteran populations, there were 180 homeless households that reported having a victim of domestic violence. 72% of these households were individuals, while the remaining 50 were families. 45% reported that the last episode of domestic violence occurred over a year ago, while 31% reported it happening within the past 3 months. The majority of the domestic violence victims (98%) were served in emergency shelters. As a note, while there are victims of domestic violence being served in HMIS participating agencies, due to federal regulations, Domestic Violence specific projects

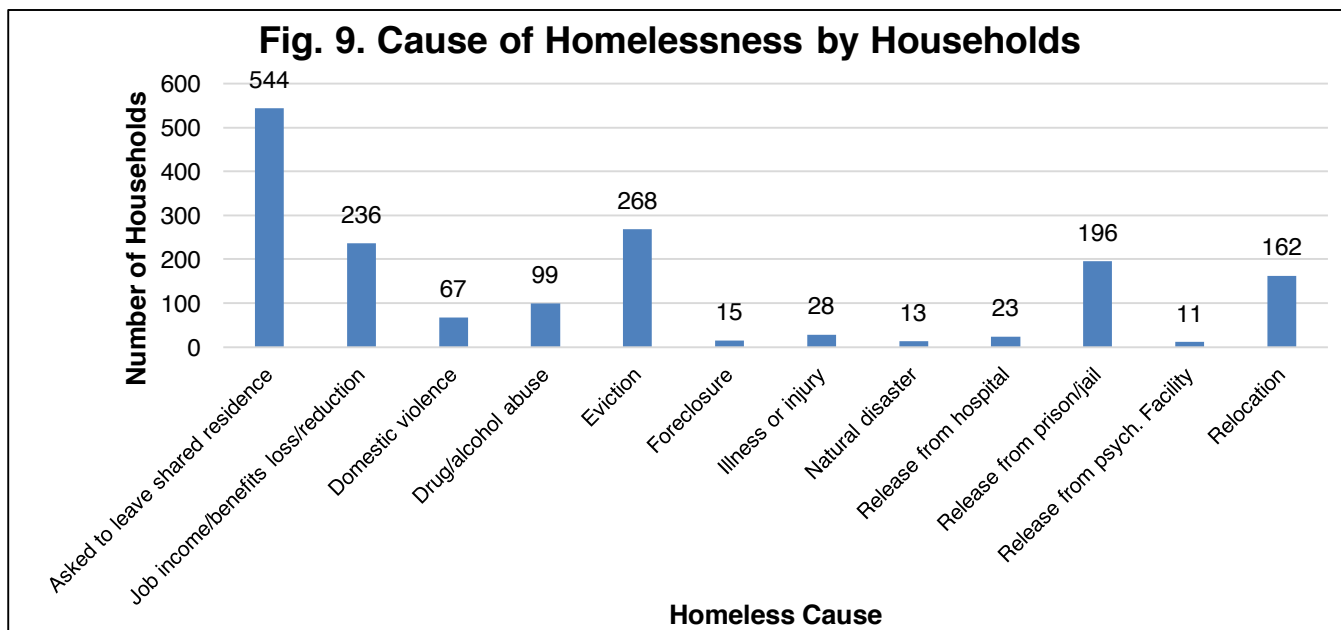
are not able to enter data into HMIS, so the number of victims served in those projects are not included in this report.

Income and Benefits. Among all homeless households served in emergency shelter or transitional housing projects during 2015, 63% had no source of income, while 5% reported receiving some form of earned income. The most common sources of cash income among households were SSI (16%) and TANF (14%). The average monthly income for households was \$188 for emergency shelter and \$581 for households served in transitional housing projects.



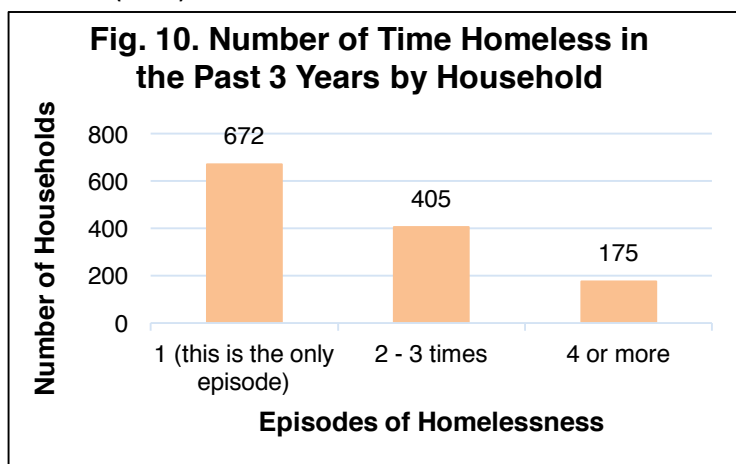
While 37% of households had some source of income, 42% of households were receiving some kind of non-cash benefit. Food Stamps was the top reported non-cash benefit, reported by 33% of households, followed by Medicaid, reported by 29%.

Cause of Homelessness and Residence Prior to Project Entry. When asked what the primary factor was that contributed to, or caused, their homelessness, more households attributed their homelessness to being asked to leave a shared residence (29%) than any other cause. As Figure 9 shows, the next most common factors were eviction (14%) and job income or benefits loss or reduction (13%).



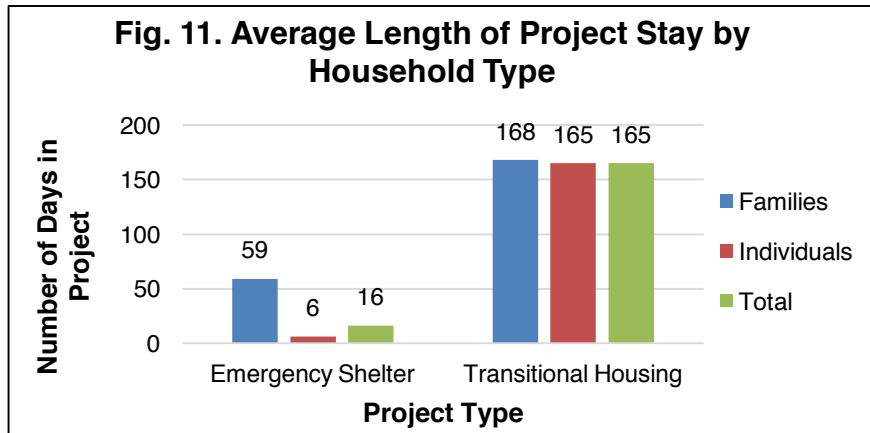
The most common response for residence prior to project entry was staying or living with friends or family, with 46% of households. The next most common response was emergency shelter (15%) followed by a place not meant for human habitation (10%).

Length of Stay at Prior Residence and Episodes of Homelessness. 36% of households served during 2015 had stated they resided in their last residence for one year or longer before entering the emergency shelter or transitional housing project, while 13% were there one week or less. Additionally, only 9% of households experienced 4 or more episodes of homelessness in the past 3 years, while 36% of households were experiencing their first episode of homelessness prior to project entry, as shown in Figure 10.



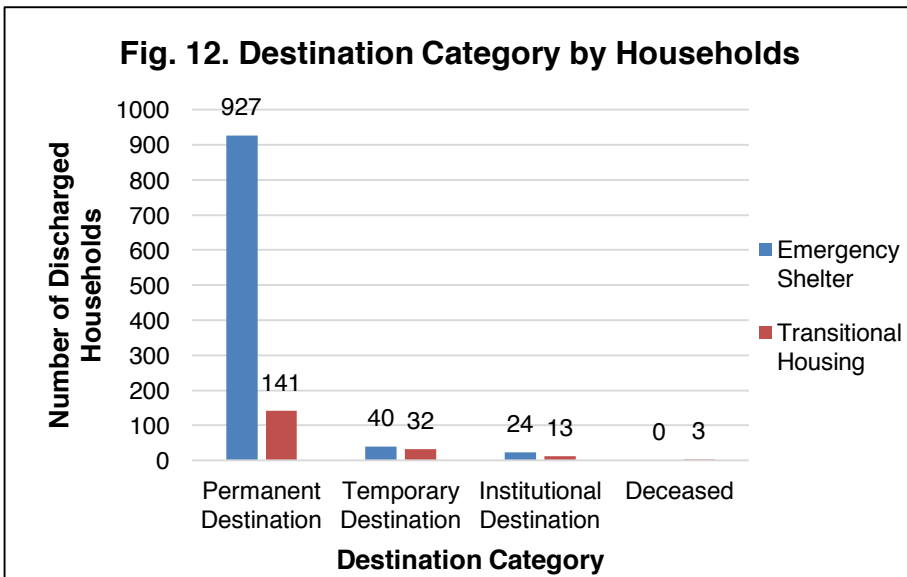
Average Length of Project Stay.

When looking at total length of project stay, families seemed to have longer lengths of program stays in both emergency shelter and transitional housing projects. When comparing the average lengths of stay in 2015 to those in 2014, the average length of stay increased by 2 days for emergency shelters and increased by 1 day for transitional housing projects in 2015.



Reason and Destination at Discharge.

A total of 1,744 households were discharged from emergency shelter and transitional housing projects during the 2015 reporting period. 20% of these households were discharged upon project completion, while 3% left for a housing opportunity prior to project completion.



Due to the nature of some homeless projects, discharge information was not able to be collected for all discharged households.

61% of households discharged in 2015 moved on to permanent destinations upon discharge from the project. A permanent destination includes a unit owned or rented by a client, permanent housing project, or living with a family

member or friend permanently. The most common permanent destination was rental by client with 54% of total households moving into a rental upon discharge. This rental could be with or without a subsidy. 4% of households moved on to a temporary destination at discharge, which could include an emergency shelter, hotel or motel, place not meant for habitation, staying with a family member or friend temporarily, safe haven, or transitional housing for homeless persons. The most common temporary destination was emergency shelter, which was reported by 2% of households. An institutional destination, which was the destination of 2% of households, includes hospitals (psychiatric or non-psychiatric), a halfway house, jail or prison, foster care, long-term care facility or a substance abuse treatment facility. The most common institutional destination was a foster care home or group home with 16 households being discharged to this location.

Appendix A: HMIS Projects Included in Report

I. Emergency Shelter Projects

Agency	Project Name
Anchor House	Anchor House - BCP
Home Front	HF Family Preservation Center
	HF Gateway
	HF-FreshStart/Emergency Placement A
Mercer County Board of Social Services	MCBOSS- Shelter Placements
Rescue Mission	RMOT-Nightly Emergency Shelter

II. Transitional Housing Projects

Agency	Project Name
Anchor House	Anchor House Anchor Line
	Anchor House Anchorage
Catholic Charities Mercer ECS	CC ECS Housing Now
Helping Arms	Helping Arms Housing Program
Home Front	HF Huchet House
	HF TLC
Rescue Mission	RMOT – Transitional Housing
United Progress Inc	UPI – Housing Program
VOADV	VOADV-Amani House Transitional Living