Union 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 Union 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 732 households were served in HMIS participating emergency shelter and transitional housing projects during the January 1, 2015 – December 31, 2015 period
- There were 60 households identified as chronically homeless during this reporting period
- 46% of all adults served either as individuals or as part of a family identified having a disabling condition
- 45% of households moved on to permanent destinations after discharge

Total Homeless Population. A total of 732 households composed of 1,040 persons were housed in Union County CoC HMIS participating emergency shelter or transitional housing projects during the January 1, 2015 – December 31, 2015 reporting period. This is a 15% decrease in the total number of households served from 2014 and an 11% decrease from the 1,164 persons served in 2014. Out of the households served in 2015, the large majority, 76% (558) were individuals, while the remaining 24% (174 households) were families. As shown in Figure 1, the most served population was individuals in emergency shelter projects, which accounted for 73% of the total population.
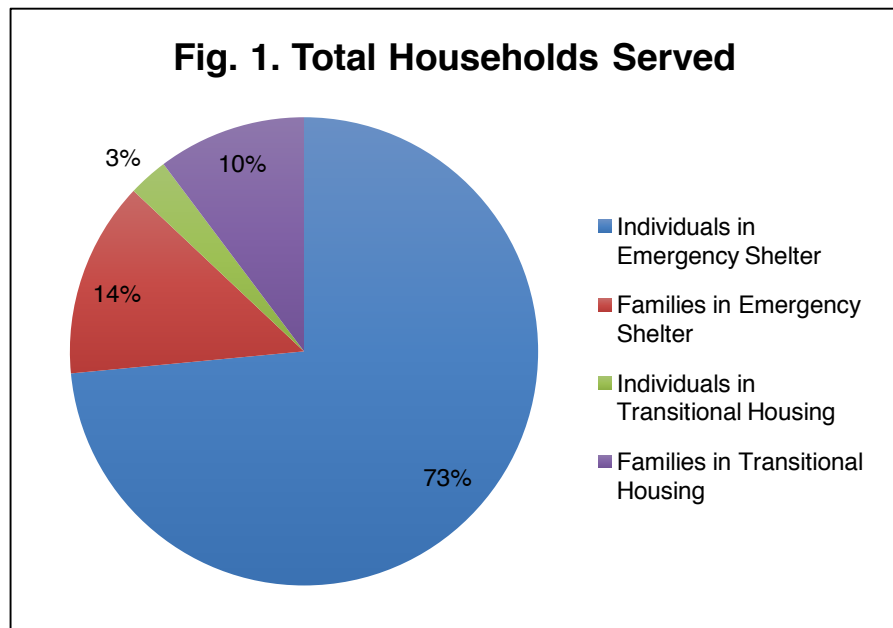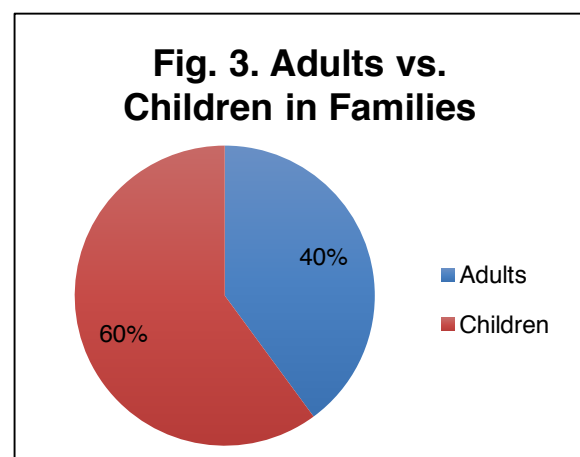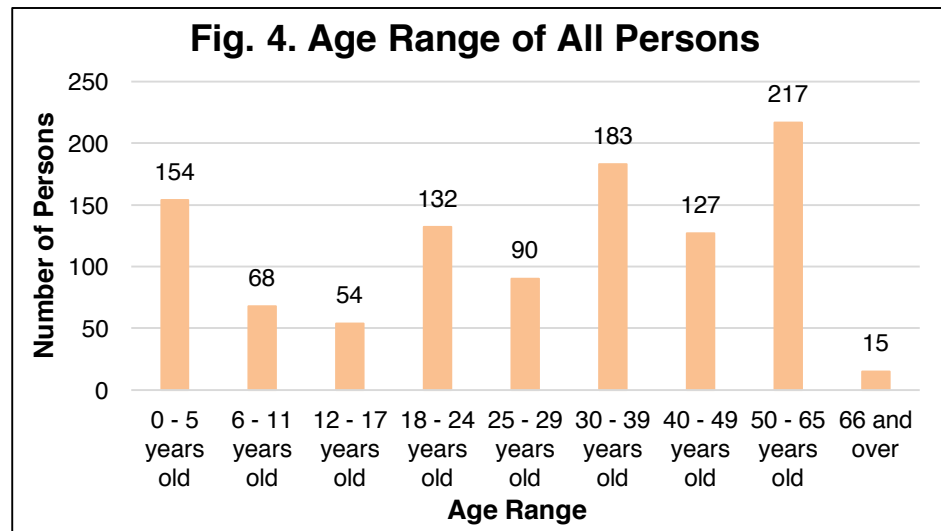
Fig. 1. Total Households Served

- Individuals in Emergency Shelter
- Families in Emergency Shelter
- Individuals in Transitional Housing
- Families in Transitional Housing

73%, 14%, 3%, 10%

Fig. 2 Total Persons Served		
	Union County	**New Jersey**
Total Persons Served	1,040	24,519
Emergency Shelter	798	20,337
Individuals	538	13,108
Families	260	7,229
Transitional Housing	242	4,134
Individuals	20	2,116
Families	222	2,018

Family Composition. Of the 174 family households served throughout Union County in 2015, 159 (91%) were households with adults and children under 18, while the remaining 15 (9%) 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.

Fig. 3. Adults vs. Children in Families

- Adults
- Children

40%, 60%

Demographics. Of the total homeless population that was served in Union County CoC during 2015, the largest percent, 27%, 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 18 and 29, which represented 21% of the total population.

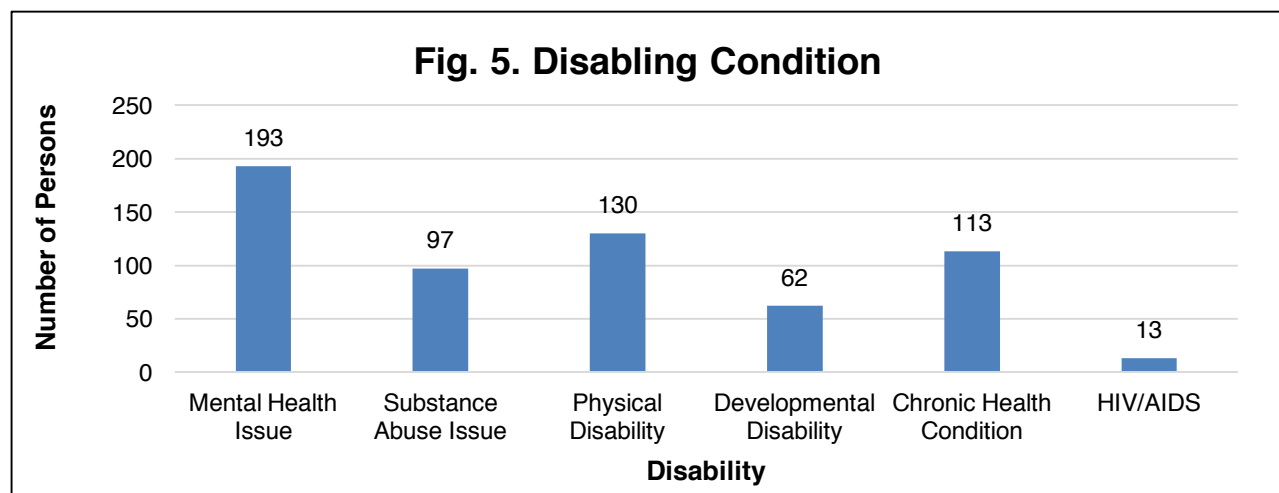**Fig. 4. Age Range of All Persons**

Similar to the 2014 numbers, just over half (55%) of the homeless persons served in Union County HMIS participating projects were male, with women representing 45% of the population.
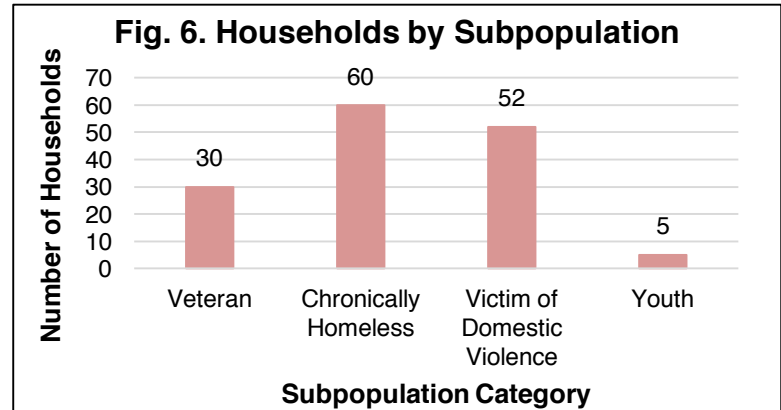
In addition, 61% of the homeless persons served during 2015 identified their race as Black or African American, making that the largest racial subgroup. The next largest was White (34%), followed by American Indian or Alaskan Native with 2%. With regards to ethnicity, 25% identified themselves as Hispanic/Latino.

Disabling Conditions. Among all persons served throughout Union County's HMIS emergency shelter and transitional housing projects, 35% identified having a disabling condition, this number includes 46% of adults and 3% of children.

Among disabled adults, 55% reported a mental health issue, making this the most prevalent disability; representing 25% of the total adult homeless population. 36% of disabled adults also reported a physical disability. Among disabled children, 56% reported a developmental disability. Another 22% of disabled children reported a physical disability.
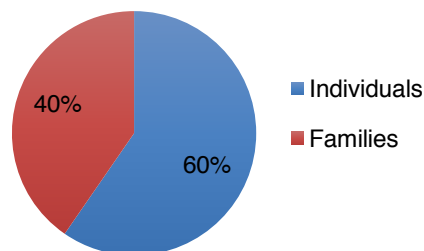
Fig. 5. Disabling Condition

Fig. 6. Households by Subpopulation

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, Union County CoC projects served a total of 60 households that were identified as chronically homeless, a 54% increase from the 39 chronically homeless households served in 2014. 98% of chronic households served in 2015 were served in emergency shelters (6 were families). The last household was a chronically homeless family served in a transitional housing project.

There were 5 individual youth only households, households without someone over age 18, served in Union County emergency shelters in 2015.

As far as veterans served, Union County projects served a total of 30 veterans throughout 2015. 97% of veterans served were individuals and only 3% were female. All of the veterans served were served in emergency shelter projects. 60% of veterans reported having some kind of disability, with the most common disability reported being a mental health issue (61%).

Fig. 7. Household Type Among Victims of Domestic Violence
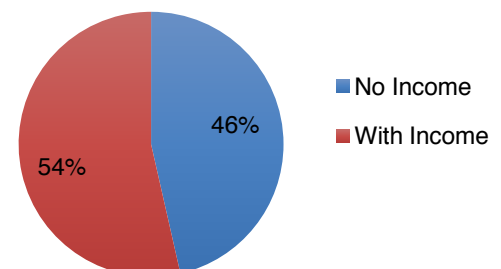

In addition to the chronic, youth and veteran populations, there were 52 homeless households that reported having a victim of domestic violence. 60% of these households were individuals, while the remaining 21 were families. 48% reported that the last episode of domestic violence occurred over a year ago, while 19% reported it happening within the past 3 months. The majority of the domestic violence victims (94%) 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.
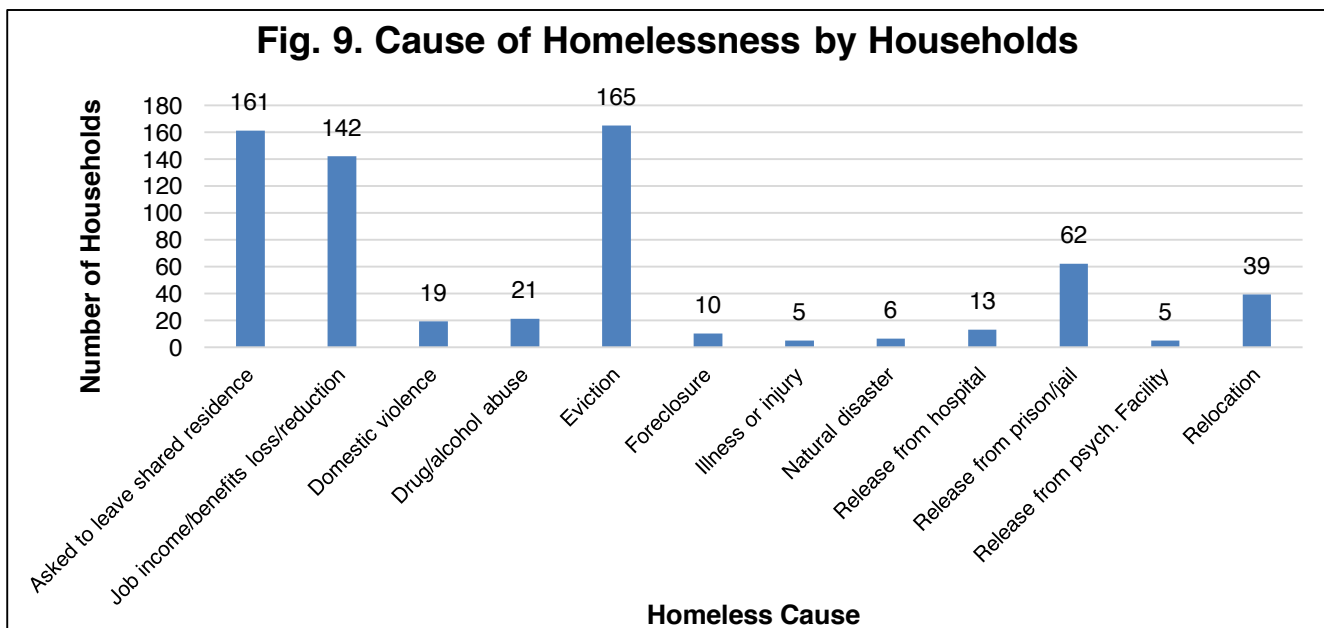
Income and Benefits. Among all homeless households served in emergency shelter or transitional housing projects during 2015, 46% had no source of income, while 12% reported receiving some form of earned income. The most common sources of cash income among households were SSI (27%) and General Assistance (17%). The average monthly income for households was $275 for emergency shelter and $581 for households served in transitional housing projects.

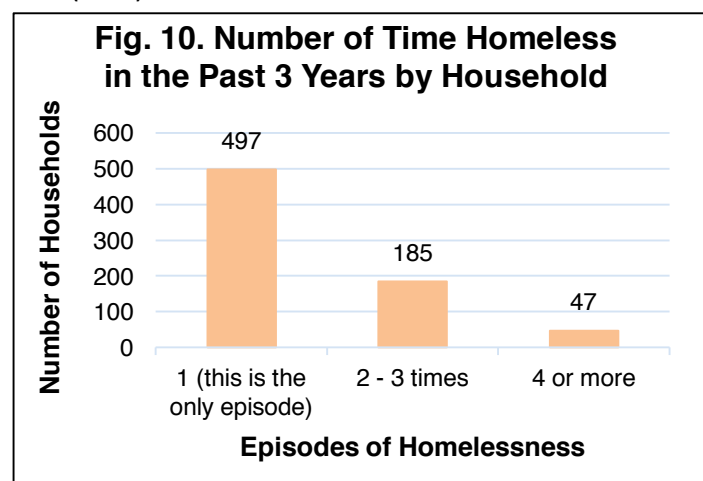**Fig. 8. Percentage of Households with Income**

While 54% of households had some source of income, 74% of households were receiving some kind of non-cash benefit. Medicaid was the top reported non-cash benefit, reported by 60% of households, followed by Food Stamps, reported by 52%.

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 evicted (23%) than any other cause. As Figure 9 shows, the next most common factors were being asked to leave a shared residence (22%) and job income or benefits loss or reduction (19%).

Fig. 9. Cause of Homelessness by Households

The most common response for residence prior to project entry was staying or living with friends or family, with 35% of households. The next most common response was emergency shelter (20%) followed by a place not meant for human habitation (11%).
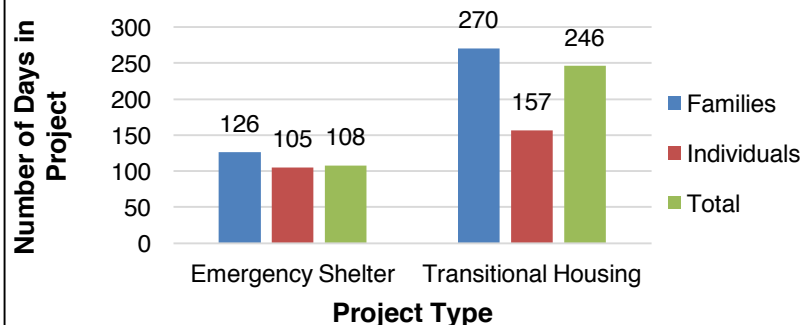
Length of Stay at Prior Residence and Episodes of Homelessness. 31% of households served during 2015 had stated they resided in their last residence for one year or longer before entering the emergency shelter or transitional housing project, while 10% were there one week or less. Additionally, only 6% of households experienced 4 or more episodes of homelessness in the past 3 years, while 68% of households were experiencing their first episode of homelessness prior to project entry, as shown in Figure 10.

Fig. 10. Number of Time Homeless in the Past 3 Years by Household
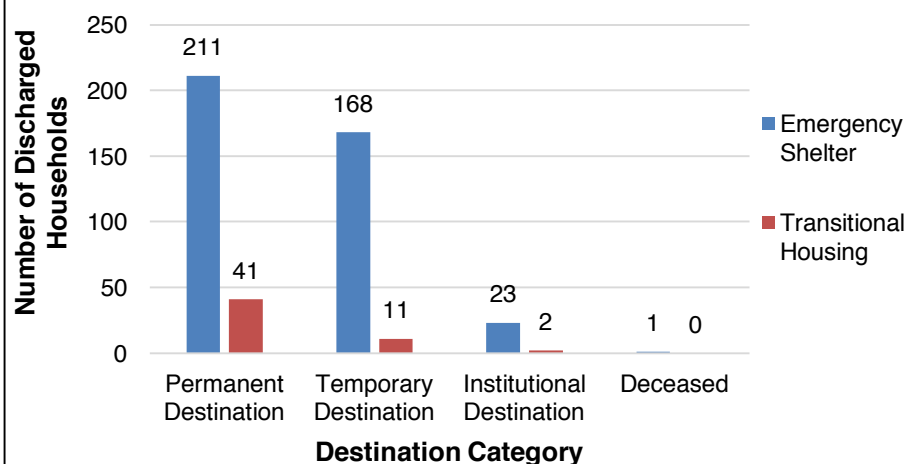
Average Length of Project Stay. When looking at total length of project stay, families seemed to have longer lengths of program stays in both emergency shelter and transitional housing projects. When comparing the average lengths of stay in 2015 to those in 2014, the average length of stay increased by 23 days for emergency shelters but decreased by 70 days, or just over 2 months, for transitional housing projects in 2015.

Fig. 11. Average Length of Project Stay by Household Type

Reason and Destination at Discharge. A total of 563 households were discharged from emergency shelter and transitional housing projects during the 2015 reporting period. 29% of these households were discharged upon project completion, while 25% left for a housing opportunity prior to completing the program.

Fig. 12. Destination Category by Households

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

45% 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, a permanent housing project, or living with a family member or friend permanently. The most common permanent destination was rental by client with 31% of total households moving into a rental upon discharge. This rental could be with or without a subsidy. 32% 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 22% of households. An institutional destination, which was the destination of 4% 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 substance abuse treatment facility with 2% of households being discharged to this location.

Appendix A: HMIS Projects Included in Report

I. Emergency Shelter Projects

Agency	Project Name
Community Access Unlimited	CAU E-CAP
	CAU-Runaway and Homeless Youth Shelter
Elizabeth Coalition to House the Homeless	ECHH – Operation Warm Heart
Family Promise	FPUC-Family Shelter
FISH Hospitality	FISH Hospitality Program
Salvation Army	Salvation Army Shelter
YMCA of Eastern Union County	Eastern Union YMCA – Madison House
	Eastern Union YMCA – Men's Dormitory
	Eastern Union YMCA – Project Sustain
YMCA of Plainfield	Plainfield Area YMCA – Y.E.S.

II. Transitional Housing Projects

Agency	Project Name
Community Access Unlimited	CAU-TIP
Covenant House	Covenant House – Raphael's Life House
Elizabeth Coalition to House the Homeless	ECHH Hospitality House
	ECHH-Joanie's House
Homefirst Interfaith Housing and Family Services	Homefirst Transitional Housing Program
YMCA of Eastern Union County	Eastern Union YMCA – Step Up Transitional House