

2008 ANNUAL ONE NIGHT COUNT
OF PEOPLE WHO ARE HOMELESS IN KING COUNTY, WA

REPORT PREPARED BY SEATTLE/KING COUNTY **COALITION ON HOMELESSNESS** (SKCCH)

8,439



White cylindrical object with a metal band and a small hook.

#OFFRBT

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Solutions CT

Large, crumpled piece of material, possibly a tarp or heavy fabric, lying on the ground.



The 28th annual One Night Count of people who are homeless in King County took place overnight on January 24-25, 2008. Hundreds of volunteers, organized by the Seattle/King County Coalition on Homelessness (SKCCH) and Operation Nightwatch, headed into the early morning darkness in parts of thirteen King County cities and unincorporated areas. These teams counted 2,631 people without shelter in three hours. During the same night, staff at nearly 200 emergency shelters and transitional housing programs completed surveys about the 5,808 people staying in their programs.

At 2:00 a.m., temperatures were below freezing for the sixth night in a row. In the middle of the night, when most people were asleep, more than 900 volunteers set out to document the people they could see sleeping or surviving outside in doorways, alleys, greenbelts, and cars. One Night Count volunteers came from a wide range of backgrounds: child care workers and low income housing developers teamed up with Emergency Medical Technician trainees; people who were homeless themselves walked with church members, social workers, and college students. Parents, teachers, veterans, and politicians bundled up, turned on their flashlights, and got a glimpse in three cold hours of what it takes to survive homelessness in our community.

For the last 28 years, SKCCH and Operation Nightwatch have organized this One Night Count of people who are homeless and without shelter. This systematic "street count" started in downtown Seattle. Because of sustained commitment from volunteers, social service agencies, and local government, the count now includes suburban cities and other parts of south, east, and north King County. Each year people come together to map and count several new areas based on local information. In 2008, people in the city of Auburn organized their first count. Through gathering first-hand information about who is homeless in our own communities, people in King County raise public awareness about homelessness and the imperative to end it.

At least 8,439 people were homeless in King County on one winter night. The street count and the providers' survey together provide the minimum number of people homeless during our One Night Count. National research suggests that at least three times that many people will be homeless in King County over the course of one year.

MAJOR FINDINGS OF THE 2008 ONE NIGHT COUNT

OVER 8,439 PEOPLE WERE HOMELESS

2,631 MEN, WOMEN, AND CHILDREN WERE WITHOUT SHELTER DURING THE THREE HOUR STREET COUNT

- **2,482 PEOPLE** WERE SEEN IN THE SAME OUTDOOR AREAS COUNTED DURING THE 2007 COUNT. This represents a 15% increase over the previous count, comparing the same locations.
- **149 PEOPLE** WERE FOUND IN NEW COUNT AREAS

5,808 PEOPLE WERE BEING SERVED IN EXISTING PROGRAMS

- **2,515 PEOPLE** WERE STAYING IN EMERGENCY SHELTERS
- **3,293 PEOPLE** WERE LIVING IN TRANSITIONAL HOUSING PROGRAMS
- **140 MEN AND WOMEN** WERE IN SEVERE WEATHER SHELTERS IN SEATTLE, OPENED ONLY IN COLD AND WET CONDITIONS. No regular severe weather shelters exist in other parts of the county, though some churches may open their basements. (These 140 people were counted among the 2,515 in emergency shelters that night).

THE GREAT MAJORITY OF PEOPLE IN LOCAL PROGRAMS ARE OUR NEIGHBORS. Nearly 80% of the people in King County's shelters and transitional housing programs became homeless in King County. The last permanent address for 85% of the households being served that night was in Washington State.

MANY PEOPLE SERVED BY LOCAL PROGRAMS RELY ON DISABILITY BENEFITS. More than a quarter of all households (27%) received income primarily from one of the four mainstream public benefit programs for people with disabilities: SSI, GAU, GAX, or ADATSA. (See Table 13 on page 15)

NINETEEN PERCENT OF HOUSEHOLDS SERVED REPORTED PAID EMPLOYMENT AS THEIR PRIMARY SOURCE OF INCOME. This was the most commonly cited primary income source for homeless households surveyed.

TRENDS

The 2008 One Night Count documented an increase in how many people are on the streets and without shelter in King County. Volunteers observed a 15 percent increase in people surviving outside in King County in the same areas counted in January 2007. Seattle provides the majority of emergency services for people who are homeless, and has the highest density of homelessness. Within Seattle city limits, the numbers of people outside in comparable areas increased by 18 percent. The total number of people without shelter counted in 2008 was also greater than in 2007 (as always, this is partly the result of including new areas).

Comparing the numbers of people in the same places from one year to the next is one way to interpret results for the unsheltered count. Between 1998 and 2004, the Street Count documented dramatic annual increases in the number of people without shelter, when the same areas were compared from one year to the next. There was no Street Count in 2005. Because of changes to the Street Count and the provider survey in 2006, comparability with previous counts is limited. In 2007, there was a slight decrease of four percent compared with the 2006 areas. The increase observed this year troubles us all.

Our community is working to create more permanent housing and related services for people who are homeless, in keeping with King County's Ten Year Plan to End Homelessness. A record of progress made to date can be found in the annual report of the Committee to End Homelessness.¹ This work is taking place in the context of a national economic downturn, the cumulative effects of years of drastically reduced federal investment in affordable low-income and public housing², and structural factors in local economies that support the conversion or loss of existing affordable housing stock. We are taking action at the local, state, and national levels to solve homelessness – and we must continue to do so.

County-wide participation in the One Night Count is broad, and increased in 2008

- Thirteen cities across King County, as well as unincorporated areas, participated in the One Night Count of people without shelter. The City of Auburn participated for the first time.
- People riding overnight on Metro buses covering much of the area from West Seattle to Bellevue, north Seattle to Renton, Federal Way, and Auburn, were counted for the second year. One hundred seventy-four people were counted seeking shelter and warmth on these late night bus routes.
- Nearly all emergency shelters and transitional housing programs in King County provided data about their residents on the night of the One Night Count. (*Staff at 64 emergency shelters and 124 transitional housing programs completed surveys.*)

Beyond the One Night Count: Volunteers sign up to take next steps

'Now that I've counted, what can I do next?' Count volunteers frequently wonder what they can do with their new understanding of how hard it is to survive one night outside, let alone weeks or months of struggling to meet basic needs and find strength and hope for the future. One Night Count volunteers' energy and desire to work to end homelessness fits with local advocates' commitment to building and sustaining the political will to end homelessness. In February 2008, SKCCH organized a special workshop – "Beyond the One Night Count" – to educate people about current opportunities to address homelessness and the urgent need to create more affordable housing through legislation. More than 80 participants came together to learn about priority solutions proposed by advocates across Washington:

- Increasing the State Housing Trust Fund to make more capital funds available to build more affordable housing.
- Securing additional funding for permanent and transitional housing and services for homeless families, youth, and single adults (Washington Families Fund and Transitional Housing, Operating, and Rent Program).
- Ending discrimination against renters who rely on programs such as Section 8 vouchers.

Homelessness and housing advocates and their allies in the state Legislature won significant victories on the first two of these issues.

CONCLUSION

The One Night Count is often described as a snapshot of homelessness. The image generated by this community effort is not a detailed portrait, yet it offers important insight into the daily and nightly lives of thousands of our King County neighbors. Staff at the dozens of area agencies that help to house people complete surveys about their clients on a single night – but they serve people 365 days a year. Every night, without the most basic security of shelter, people are struggling to survive outdoors. Their sleeping bags and tents may be glimpsed only in passing, but their struggles are no less real because they are not always visible.

The One Night Count is best used as a gauge of existing need, rather than as a measure of success or failure. The annual exercise grounds us in the local realities of a regional and national crisis. This year's results remind us of the great need in King County for both immediate and long-term responses to the crisis of homelessness and the lack of affordable housing. Our community has a wealth of resources to invest in meeting these needs, and our collective decisions about those investments will determine how successful our efforts will be.

The One Night Count raises public awareness and lets concerned neighbors become part of local efforts to end homelessness. A street count volunteer notes each figure wrapped in a blanket, and asks herself why so many people are without shelter and housing, and what it will take to change this reality. Seeing people try to shelter themselves from cold, rain, and wind, and work to fend off despair and hopelessness, *should* prompt hard questions and powerful emotions. With the release of the 2008 One Night Count report, let's wrestle with such questions, and allow those emotions to strengthen our resolve to end homelessness for thousands of real people who are our neighbors.

ALISON EISINGER

Executive Director, Seattle/King County Coalition on Homelessness

¹ *The Ten Year Plan to End Homelessness in King County and Creating Lasting Solutions Together: 2007 Annual Report of the Committee to End Homelessness* may be read or downloaded at: www.cehkc.org

² See the Western Regional Advocacy Project report *Without Housing: Decades of Federal Housing Cutbacks, Massive Homelessness, and Policy Failure (2006)*, available at: <http://www.wraphome.org/wh/index.php>

INTRODUCTION TO THE ONE NIGHT COUNT

The One Night Count is a yearly snapshot of the nature and extent of homelessness in King County. The Count has two parts: a street count of people without any shelter, and a survey of those in emergency shelters and transitional housing programs. This assessment is one of the oldest and best-respected counts in the United States. The 2008 unsheltered count and survey of emergency shelter and transitional housing providers took place over the night of January 24-25. Historically conducted in late October, the count was shifted in 2006 to the end of January, to coordinate with other counts across the nation. Conducting the One Night Count in mid-winter rather than in the fall likely affects the results of the count.

The Seattle/King County Coalition on Homelessness (SKCCH) produces this annual report to inform our community about the current local state of homelessness. For the past 28 years, the One Night Count has simultaneously collected important information and raised public awareness about homelessness locally. SKCCH hopes that the report will be useful to members of the public, planners and policy makers, service providers, and advocates who want to understand and respond to homelessness in King County – and who work to end it.

Table 1: One Night Count Data 1998-2008

	OCT 1998	OCT 1999	OCT 2000	OCT 2001	OCT 2002	OCT 2003	OCT 2004	JAN 2006*	JAN 2007	JAN 2008
Unsheltered Street Count	784	983	1,085	1,454	2,040	1,899	2,216	1,946	2,159	2,631
Emergency Shelter and Transitional Housing Count	3,543	3,965	4,500	4,671	4,675	4,617	4,636	5,964	5,680	5,808
TOTAL	4,327	4,948	5,585	6,125	6,715	6,516	6,852	7,910	7,839	8,439

PEOPLE IN EMERGENCY SHELTERS AND TRANSITIONAL HOUSING: PROVIDER SURVEY

King County Housing and Community Development (Homeless Housing Programs) surveys every emergency shelter and transitional housing provider on the night of the count. Providers at 64 emergency shelters and 124 transitional housing programs completed the 2008 survey, providing information about that night's residents. This represents nearly all of the shelter and transitional housing programs found in the King County Inventory of Homeless Units and Beds [See footnote on page 11]. Results from the 2008 One Night Count Provider Survey are summarized in the second half of this report.

Table 2: Comparison of 2007 and 2008 ONC Results

	JANUARY 2007	JANUARY 2008
Street Count (like areas)	2,159	2,482
Street Count (new areas)	–	149
Street Count Totals	2,159	2,631
Emergency Shelter	2,368	2,515
Transitional Housing	3,312	3,293
Sheltered Totals	5,680	5,808
TOTAL	7,839	8,439

The One Night Count survey produces data about people using homeless housing programs at a single point in time (thus, no person is counted twice). Staff in emergency shelters and transitional housing programs complete a survey describing the group of people in their programs on that particular night. No information that would identify a specific individual is reported. The survey gives us a good picture of the number and characteristics of these people and households. However, these numbers cannot tell us anything about people who are homeless but not connected to any shelter or housing, or who only use services such as food banks or free meals, hygiene centers, or clinics.

Emergency Shelter is short-term temporary shelter from the elements and unsafe streets. Such shelter is run through a range of non-profit and private agencies; many rely on support from congregations. Shelter may be as basic and temporary as a mat on a basement floor, accessed by waiting in line each night, or it may be 'enhanced' shelter with assistance from staff, and confirmed access to a mat or cot for successive nights. A few agencies still offer limited emergency shelter through short-term (1-3 nights) motel vouchers.

Transitional Housing is temporary housing (ranging from 90 days to 24 months) that includes supportive services designed to help people make the transition to permanent housing. Case managers work to help residents find affordable housing or qualify for public subsidies or public housing.

PEOPLE WITHOUT SHELTER: THE STREET COUNT

The Street Count consists of a 'moment in time' unduplicated tally of people living without shelter in neighborhoods of Seattle, south King County (Auburn, Federal Way, Kent, Renton, White Center), north King County (Shoreline, Bothell, Kenmore, Woodinville), and the Eastside (Bellevue, Redmond, Kirkland). In 2008, people in Auburn organized the first street count in parts of their city. For the second year, in 2008 teams counted people riding throughout King County's network of late night buses.

The Street Count is intended to foster an understanding of the patterns of survival for people who sleep in publicly accessible areas. However, people who are homeless and living outside are above all concerned with survival, and many go to great lengths to protect themselves by hiding from public view. The dozens of areas counted between 2:00 and 5:00 a.m. are mapped out ahead of time.¹ Teams of volunteers go out with a trained leader who is familiar with the boundaries of the map. They are instructed to count only people visible in publicly accessible places within their zone. Count teams are asked not to enter abandoned buildings or go onto private property, and in most cases, not to enter dense underbrush or wooded areas. These are, however, the very places where people may seek shelter, especially in wet and cold winter weather. Thus, the street count always misses an unknown number of people without shelter. It is possible to mitigate the built-in limitations

Table 3: Summary of 2008 Unsheltered (Street) Count in Selected Areas of King County

	SEATTLE	KENT	NORTH END	EAST SIDE	WHITE CTR	FEDERAL WAY	RENTON	NIGHT OWL BUSES	AUBURN	TOTAL
Men	665	15	11	69	1	18	12	150	5	946
Women	141	4	3	12	1	8	1	19	1	190
Gender Unknown	1,158	44	20	70	56	63	31	0	34	1,476
Minor (under 18)	12	2	0	2	0	1	0	2	0	19
TOTAL	1,976	65	34	153	58	90	44	171	40	2,631
Benches	12	0	2	1	0	0	0	0	0	15
Parking Garages	12	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	12
Cars/Trucks	652	36	17	41	54	33	18	0	30	881
Structures	212	1	4	10	2	35	0	0	2	266
Under Roadways	156	8	0	5	0	7	5	0	4	185
Doorways	140	0	2	3	0	0	0	0	0	145
City Parks	28	0	0	2	1	0	0	0	1	32
Bushes/ Undergrowth	52	4	2	6	0	2	13	0	0	79
Bus Stops	49	1	2	0	1	1	3	0	0	57
Alleys	25	0	0	5	0	1	1	0	0	32
Walking Around	399	5	3	9	0	7	4	0	3	430
Other	239	10	2	71	0	4	0	171	0	497
TOTAL	1,976	65	34	153	58	90	44	171	40	2,631

←
TABLE 1 NOTES:

The unsheltered portion of the One Night Count has grown to cover more geographic area over time. Program participation in the survey of shelter and housing providers has varied over time.

* In 2006 the One Night Count was shifted to January from October. That year, fifty more programs participated in the survey than did in 2004. These changes limit comparability of counts before and after 2006.

This table does not include the "balance of county" estimate for people without shelter, which was dropped in 2006.

←
TABLE 2 NOTES:

The number of people found in the same areas counted in 2007 increased by 15% this year. The Street Count incorporated new areas in 2008. For additional detail about people in shelter and transitional housing see pages 11-17.

→
TABLE 3 NOTES:

Auburn participated in the ONC for the first time in 2008. The Night Owl buses cover large portions of King County and are reported separately. The North End count includes parts of Shoreline, Woodinville, Kenmore, and Bothell; the East Urban count includes parts of Bellevue, Redmond, and Kirkland

¹ In order to be able to compare numbers from one year to the next, once established, the mapped boundaries do not change.

of this approach by using additional methods of counting. In 2007, a new method of interviewing people in suburban and rural parts of the county was piloted; in future years interviews and other techniques may be used to complement the count.

People who are homeless are constantly on the move, and changes on the ground may mean that a place that was once a safe haven is no longer accessible. How many people are observed in a given area or region can fluctuate from year to year, sometimes for unknown reasons. As the count has grown beyond its original downtown Seattle boundaries, it has come to encompass the urban, suburban, and rural realities of homelessness. Gentrification and development in urban and suburban downtowns may push people away and into outlying neighborhoods and other parts of the region. Official sweeps of campsites (removing people and their belongings from public places where they have sought shelter), changes in police presence, and other local activities may affect where people can seek and find shelter, and how urgently they attempt to remain unnoticed.

STRENGTHENING AND EXPANDING THE ONE NIGHT COUNT

Each year for the past several years, additional suburban cities, neighborhoods, and parts of unincorporated King County have joined the effort to count those who are living outside and without shelter in their communities. Organizers are in the process of expanding the One Night Count to document more fully the scope of homelessness in our region. This expansion involves trying new ways of counting people who might not be counted through existing survey and street count methods alone, and partnering with community members, service providers, and local governments to increase the geographic area covered.

People who are homeless and without housing move for a variety of reasons. Organizers continue to add new count areas within participating cities and communities, and continue to work to include additional municipalities in the Unsheltered Count. Between street counts each year, SKCCH gathers on-the-ground information about where it might make sense to expand the count. For the sake of consistency and completeness, existing count areas remain the same despite changing circumstances, and are rarely dropped.

Metro Night Owl Buses: For the second year, volunteer count teams rode the early morning “Night Owl” buses of the Metro bus system. In three hours, the Bus Count teams documented 174 homeless people riding on 13 distinct round trips. These teams paired people who were homeless (some of whom had used the buses for shelter themselves) with people who were new to this experience. Together, they distinguished between people going to or from swing shift or early morning jobs, and those who were riding the buses to find warmth, shelter, and rest. During last year’s Unsheltered Count, 124 people were counted riding the buses overnight.

Changes on the Ground

Interviews with volunteers who participated in the Seattle count for three or more years suggest that changes in the local landscape, including construction and gentrification, may make it harder for people to find shelter in more densely populated neighborhoods. Experienced counters note that businesses use fences and bright lighting to keep people out of parking lots and doorways. Signs are posted warning “No parking 2.00 a.m. – 5.00 a.m.” on some streets. The number of people observed living in cars, vans, and campers continues to increase, according to these counters (this seems to be true across the county).

A count in a given area or neighborhood may vary dramatically over just a few years due to changes on the ground. Gentrification and the development of empty lots in or near downtown Seattle change the availability of places to keep dry and out of sight near homeless services and public transportation. In unincorporated King County, development of vacant land is changing the location of some encampments. Flooding affects people camped along rivers. For these reasons, simply comparing the same count areas from one year to the next cannot present the full story of where homeless people without shelter are.



Stories from the One Night Count

Volunteers from the Seattle/King County Coalition on Homelessness (SKCCH) interviewed counters as they returned to area headquarters to report their numbers. The following brief stories are a few of those told by some of the 900 count volunteers. They give a glimpse into the real life circumstances of the individuals who were wrapped in blankets or huddled in cars that night. *Details of locations have been omitted in order to protect the privacy of homeless people, the safety of volunteers, and the integrity of the Count.*

The numbers hit home with me even though I do this work.

I've led a count team in this park for several years. A week before the count I went to survey the area, but when we got there on the night of the count, I could see that the bushes had just been cut back. There were no campers there, although there had been the week before. I found two ID's, and food stamp cards that had been placed on a wall – I guess by the people cutting the bushes, so that if the man and woman came back, they could find them? There was not much remaining except a tarp and some tennis shoes.

I talked with a security guard for a building where there were people sleeping around the building. He said "I let them sleep here. They just have to get out in the morning." He acknowledged that the building management does not want them there.

Our group encountered a man under a highway. He invited us to his campsite, saying that we were his first guests. He had a mattress, a sleeping bag and boxes of food and belongings. He leaves them there during the day. He told us that people living there agree not to bother each others' belongings. He said that "we need more services" and appeared to be interested in other options, rather than continuing to live there.

I walked along thinking we hadn't seen many people – then in the end it turned out we'd counted 32.

We surprised one gentleman in a wheelchair who was way back in a doorway, almost hidden. He was a bi-lateral amputee. I felt bad that he didn't seem to be covered warmly enough for the cold night.

We went to a spot under a bridge that I drive over every day. I never noticed that there were homeless there, now I have such a different perspective. I see people in my mental health organization who have phobias and mentally can't handle shelters, so they don't have many other options.

I did think about how cold it was, and lonely, and there are people here every night and they don't have a choice. I remember being a kid being in the woods and thinking it was an adventure, but that's not how it is.

My son asked me, "when you find someone, can you give them these quarters?"

Most people were in open space. It wasn't what I expected. I was unaware how many homeless there are in cars. It didn't occur to me that a homeless person would have a car.



THE REALITY OF SURVIVING OUTSIDE

Spending a wet and cold Northwest night outdoors is not an unusual experience for the majority of the people seen during the Street Count. The space available in King County's emergency shelter network does not meet the needs of all people who need shelter. While nearly 6,000 people had somewhere dry and off the streets thanks to local programs and providers, more than 2,631 others were without even the minimum security of a single night's rest on a mat on the floor indoors. Under very cold and wet conditions, Seattle opens 100 severe weather-only shelter spaces; King County can accommodate 50 men and 40 women in its winter shelters, open from October through March. Shelters throughout the county are, for the most part, full. Some people who sleep outside may not be able to meet shelter requirements (few shelters can accommodate couples without children or people with pets). Most emergency shelters are overnight only, and few can allow people to store their belongings. Space is not always guaranteed from one night to the next. People who, due to past trauma or present mental illness, are unable to cope with being indoors or in a large group facility, tend to avoid shelters altogether.

Daytime does not much ease the strains for people who are homeless. There are a few formal hygiene facilities where people can shower, use the toilet, brush their teeth, or do laundry, but the lines are long and the hours limited. In a handful of daytime drop-in centers where people can sit down, warm up, and have a cup of coffee, lines are also long – and in many communities, there are no such places. People who are homeless seek and find refuge where they can, whether in public libraries or on park benches.

Over the past year, SKCCH has been hearing from people who are homeless and without shelter about the circumstances under which they are living outside. In general, they have nowhere to store their personal belongings, few places to clean themselves or their clothing. Here is what some have said.

"Some of [the shelters] you have to be in by 5:30 p.m. – am I going to say that I got to leave the job early today because I'm staying in a homeless shelter and I have to come in by 5:30? That's why I camp. Sometimes I get a referral to Nightwatch under the bridge over there, but that's at 11:00 p.m. and you're not certain to get a space even then, only if there's a bed. It's been snowing, sleeting, raining. It's hard to get your temperature up after you've been cold like that."

"I have a dog, I call her Wienerdog, she's a miniature dachshund. She's my baby. We've been together a long time, over 12 years. I moved under the bridge because I was sleeping on the sidewalk, but I got beat up three times by kids from the club who think it's fun. It was quiet, safer under the bridge. During that real cold spell, I left in the morning, came back in the afternoon, and everything was gone. I lost a lot: camp stove, shoes, a really good sleeping bag that someone gave me. I been there all winter long. I got lucky – someone got me an old van, it runs, and I'm sleeping in it. I have to pay for parking. It's really a big problem, because you still get harassed sleeping in the van."



Sharing City Shelter

*Warmth, convenience, shelter from the elements.
Bus shelters.*

*Of course, if they are too closed in they become unsafe
anything can happen in there
so we'll have an open front
glass sides
with big gaps
and a tiny little roof
and it's still a shelter
you can't possibly get more than half drowned in there.*

It is still an attraction to those homeless people

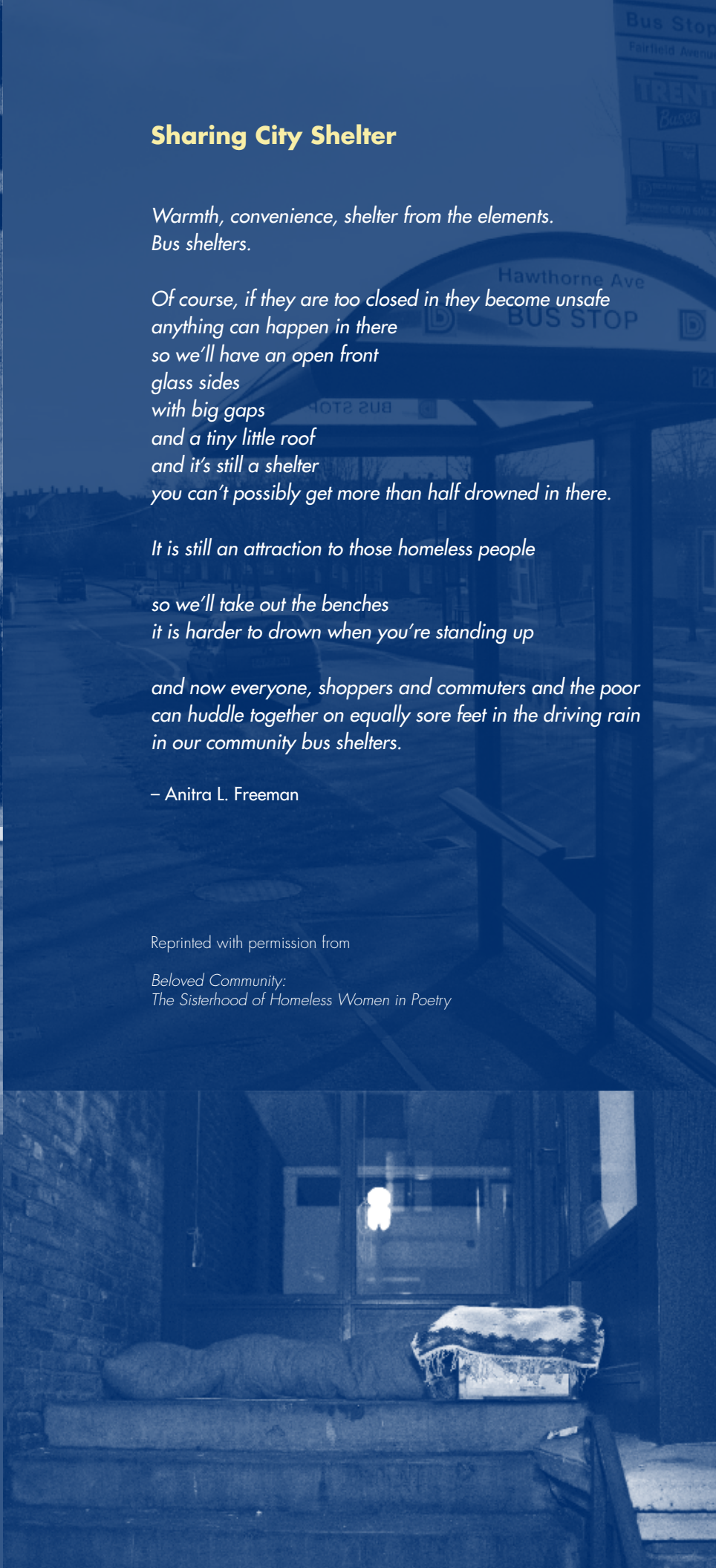
*so we'll take out the benches
it is harder to drown when you're standing up*

*and now everyone, shoppers and commuters and the poor
can huddle together on equally sore feet in the driving rain
in our community bus shelters.*

– Anitra L. Freeman

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*Beloved Community:
The Sisterhood of Homeless Women in Poetry*



Photos: top - Chris Purdum, above - Beth Clemetson, lower right - Katia Roberts

FINDINGS FROM THE UNSHELTERED OR 'STREET' COUNT

The 2008 Street Count found a total of 2,631 people living on the streets in the targeted count areas throughout King County. This includes 2,482 people seen in the areas covered in the previous count (January 25, 2007), and 149 people in new count areas. Forty of these people were counted in Auburn, which was participating in the One Night Count for the first time.

The general locations of the 2,631 people who were counted outdoors or in cars during the 2008 Unsheltered Count are summarized in Table 3 (page 5). This table also shows the number of people without shelter in each participating count region, and provides regional subtotals by gender. A large proportion of people were recorded as 'gender unknown' because it is often impossible to determine whether a person dressed and covered to survive the night outside is a woman or a man. It is also usually not possible to determine how old someone is. Only when a count team is certain that a person is under 18 years old is that person recorded as a minor. Thus, these numbers likely under-report the number of children and youth without shelter.

People who have no shelter find different ways to survive: to stay dry, warm, and safe. They may find shelter in doorways or under building overhangs, use whatever they can find as windbreaks, or look for hidden places where they will not be noticed. Some people go to great lengths to create shelters for themselves, constructing lean-tos, tents, or shacks out of tarps and scrap wood. Others simply try to keep moving, walking the streets until daybreak.

There were few noticeable differences in what kinds of places people were observed this year as compared with previous counts. The proportion of people surviving homelessness by living in vehicles seems to be increasing. Living in cars, vans, or other vehicles is a common mode of survival in cities as well as in suburban parts of King County.

Chronic Homelessness

Off the beaten path and well-hidden for years: People who are chronically homeless and mentally ill

As compelling as the One Night Count is, I don't believe most of the people I work with would show up in the street count. They spend the nights off the beaten paths, well hidden, and have done so in many cases for years. What is perhaps most significant about the people I see is how little connection they have with systems and services. They were not born homeless, nor have they always been hidden homeless souls. The decline is often gradual as threads of connection fray and contacts with others, family, friends and caregivers are lost. Mental disorders involving the complex and subtle chemistry and functioning of the brain are often episodic, difficult to diagnose, ebbing and flowing in their intensity. Mental illnesses, trauma and abuse and chemical dependency have a cumulative effect over time on a person's emotions, thinking, and behavior.

One man I work with is in his mid-seventies. He has been homeless since the housing authority closed his building to make way for the convention center more than 15 years ago. He recently collapsed twice on the street, was taken to the ER, rehydrated, and discharged both times back to the streets. His application for senior housing has been denied due to the lack of a rental history and a credit report that shows a wife whom he never legally divorced has a debt in collection. We are appealing the decision. There is no affordable market rate housing available. He has been advised to apply for a unit at a non-profit housing group with an estimated waiting period of 18 months. Meanwhile, he camps in an old trailer full of rotting garbage with no electricity or running water parked in the woods. You would never know he is there.

Craig Rennebohm

Craig Rennebohm conducts a street ministry in Seattle, connecting with and caring for people who struggle with long-term and disabling mental illness and homelessness. He is one of many community workers who contributed information to the 2008 One Night Count.

RESULTS FROM THE 2008 EMERGENCY SHELTER AND TRANSITIONAL HOUSING SURVEY

Five thousand, seven hundred and eighty-one people who were homeless were staying in shelters and transitional housing programs on January 25, 2008. Of these, 2,515 people were in emergency shelters, and 3,293 were in transitional housing programs across King County.² Because the survey is conducted on a single night, these numbers are unduplicated. Altogether, a minimum of 8,439 people were homeless during the 2008 One Night Count (without any shelter, sleeping in emergency shelters, or staying in transitional programs).

Providers at 64 emergency shelters and 124 transitional housing programs completed surveys for the 2008 One Night Count. [See page 5 for definitions of emergency shelter and transitional housing.] The tables that follow summarize data from these surveys. Some tables contain information (age, race, and ethnicity) about the individual people who were served that night. Other tables refer to information (such as income) which is reported for households (in this context a household can refer to a single person or to two or more people, including families with children).

One Night Count survey results can help identify issues and trends in homelessness and service provision. However, care should be taken when interpreting the numbers. Please note the following when referring to the figures presented in this section:

- **This information was collected at a single point in time.** Thus, results should not be generalized. The charts reflect how many individuals and households received shelter and transitional housing services on the night of January 24-25, 2008, and the characteristics reported about them.
- **The data do not reflect people who are homeless and not linked to overnight services.** Only people who use emergency shelter and transitional housing, not all people who are homeless, are represented by these figures. There may be differences between those who can and do access housing and shelter programs and those who do not. The Street Count documents some of the people who are not in shelter, but is understood to be an undercount.
- **These demographics tell us as much about what programs are available in our community as they do about the people who use them.** Almost no couples without children and few unaccompanied minors are reported in the survey. This is not necessarily because they do not need shelter, but because almost no beds or programs are designated for people in those circumstances. The number, type, and proportion of families with children counted in the survey is directly related to the number and type of programs designed to serve families with children.
- **The inventory of how many beds are available and in what type of programs changes somewhat from year to year.** The number and type of programs reporting, as well as the fact that new programs open and others close, limits direct comparability from one year to the next. Changes in provider survey results from one year to the next are likely to be small, and more likely reflect programmatic changes rather than changes in who is in need of shelter and housing. Comparisons with survey results before 2006 should be made with particular caution. The 2006 survey included a number of beds in transitional housing programs which had not been included in previous surveys. Also beginning in 2006, the One Night Count took place in January, rather than in October (when it had been conducted for 25 years). This change in season may affect both the survey of sheltered homeless people and the count of people without shelter.

² In 2008, there was essentially no change in the number of year-round emergency shelter beds available. However, on the night of the 2008 count, in addition to the year-round inventory, 140 mats on the floor were made available in severe weather only emergency shelters. In transitional housing programs there was a net increase of 49 units (139 beds) for families with children, and two units for single individuals. A number of units (173) of transitional housing for single individuals were removed from the 2008 inventory. These units provide supportive transitional housing to people who need support for reasons other than homelessness, and had been inaccurately included in past inventories of homeless units. The complete listing of emergency shelters and transitional housing programs in King County is in the *Inventory of Homeless Units and Beds: Seattle/King County Spring 2008* (second document from the bottom), found at <http://www.metrokc.gov/dchs/csd/Housing/Reports.htm>

SURVEY INFORMATION ABOUT INDIVIDUALS

The 5,808 people served in emergency shelters and transitional housing on January 24, 2008 were in a variety of household compositions.

Table 4: Individuals by household type and type of program

	EMERGENCY SHELTER	TRANSITIONAL HOUSING
Families with children	622	2,300
Single men	1,397	679
Single women	468	272
Unaccompanied minors	12	40
Couples without children	16	2
Subtotal	2,515	3,293
TOTAL NUMBER OF PEOPLE		5,808

Race and Ethnicity

People of color are significantly over-represented in the homeless population, with the exception of Asian/Pacific Islanders. The following table shows the race and ethnicity of those who are served by our emergency shelters and transitional housing programs compared to the overall King County population.

Table 5: Race and ethnicity of people served in King County shelters and transitional housing programs (by percentage of homeless and general populations)

	SHELTERED HOMELESS			GENERAL KING COUNTY
	ES	TH	COMBINED	POPULATION*
African American/Black	36%	44%	40% (2,331)	5.4%
White	38%	31%	34% (1,981)	75.5%
Hispanic	11%	10%	11% (611)	5.5%
Multi-racial	5%	7%	6% (353)	4.1%
Asian/Pacific Islander	3%	4%	4% (218)	11.3%
Native American	4%	3%	3% (196)	0.9%
Unknown	4%	1%	2% (118)	NA
TOTAL NUMBER OF PEOPLE				

*General Population data are taken from the 2000 U.S. Census, and can be found at <http://www.metrokc.gov/KCCensus/>

Age

One thousand, eight hundred and seventy-eight children under the age of 18 were among the 5,808 people staying in emergency shelters or transitional housing on the night of the count.

Table 6: Ages of people in King County homeless housing

	EMERGENCY SHELTER	TRANSITIONAL HOUSING	TOTAL
Birth to 5 years	170	623	793
6-12 years	134	512	646
13-17 years	82	357	439
18-25 years	197	421	618
26-54 years	1,408	1,242	2,650
55-64 years	389	119	508
65 years and older	108	19	127
Unknown	27	0	27
TOTAL	2,515	3,293	5,808

Immigration status and limited spoken English

Among immigrants and refugees who are in homeless housing programs, the vast majority (85%) are members of families with children. Just under half of all people counted in the survey were in families with children (2,922 of 5,808). This reflects the fact that more shelter and transitional housing is available for families with children than is available for single adults or couples without children. Programs reported that many immigrants and refugees spoke limited English.

Table 7: People identified as immigrants or refugees and people identified as speaking limited English*

	SINGLE PEOPLE	INDIVIDUALS IN FAMILIES WITH CHILDREN	TOTAL
Immigrant or refugee	99	776	875
Limited English speaking	140	636	776

*These categories are not mutually exclusive: a person may be reported as an immigrant or refugee, or as speaking limited English, or both.

Disabilities and other health concerns

Chemical dependency and mental illness are the most frequently reported disabling conditions for people who are homeless. **Table 8** shows *reported instances* of these conditions, as well as of chronic homelessness, because this is defined, in part, by having a serious physical or mental disability (including chemical dependency). Staff completing surveys could identify more than one disability for a single person.

This information should not be used to draw conclusions regarding what percentage of people who are homeless have disabilities. These raw numbers certainly under-represent the extent of disabilities among all people served by homeless housing programs. Several programs do not collect any information about disabilities. In addition, many people with disabling conditions, including people who experience chronic homelessness, are simply not connected with shelter or housing services. Dual diagnoses (of people with both mental illness and chemical dependency) were reported 509 times.

Chronic homelessness: This report uses the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) definition of a person who is chronically homeless: “an unaccompanied homeless individual with a disabling condition who has either been continuously homeless for a year or more, or has had at least four episodes of homelessness in the past three years.” (This definition excludes couples, youth, and families with children, although they, too, may be homeless for long periods and repeatedly.) To be considered chronically homeless, a person must be sleeping in a place not meant for human habitation or in an emergency homeless shelter, and have a disabling condition. A *disabling condition* limits an individual’s ability to work or perform activities of daily living, and is defined as a diagnosable substance use disorder, serious mental illness, developmental disability, or chronic physical illness or disability including the co-occurrence of two or more of these conditions.

Table 8: Instances of reported disabilities, chronic homelessness, and selected health conditions

	SINGLE PEOPLE	INDIVIDUALS IN FAMILIES WITH CHILDREN	TOTAL
Mental illness <i>(serious mental illness: a subset of above)</i>	486 (272)	586 (172)	1,072 (444)
Alcohol or substance abuse <i>(chronic substance abuse: a subset of above)</i>	625 (435)	565 (305)	1,190 (740)
Chronically homeless*	730	291	1,021
Physical disability	271	176	447
HIV/AIDS	23	84	107
Developmental disability	43	60	103

*This table reports reported instances, not individual people (see data notes above).

Domestic Violence and Physical Abuse

According to the survey there were 1,125 people accessing shelter and transitional housing programs who reported experiencing violence or abuse within the past year. Eighty-four percent of these people were in families with children; 16 percent were single. Just over half of these people (606) were adults (almost all of whom were women), and 519 of them (46%) were children.

Military Service

In the 2008 survey, 444 people were identified as having served in the military (28 of these were women). Nearly 70 percent of the veterans were in emergency shelters rather than in transitional housing programs. Almost all of the identified veterans (99%) were in programs designed to serve single adults.

Discharge from Institutions

Many people are discharged from institutions such as hospitals, jails, prisons, treatment programs, or from the foster care system with nowhere to go. This problem is one area of focus for those working to prevent homelessness. The 2008 survey collected information about 549 people who had been discharged from certain institutions or programs within the past year. While more programs collected these data in 2008, many emergency shelters and transitional housing programs still do not collect this information. Thus, the data in **Table 9** are suggestive, but incomplete.

Table 9: Instances of institutional contact within the past year (reported for 549 people)

	EMERGENCY SHELTER	TRANSITIONAL HOUSING	TOTAL
Jail / Prison or work release facility	98	136	234
In-patient drug/alcohol treatment	68	120	188
Hospital for physical illness	78	94	172
Psychiatric hospital	26	59	85
Foster care system	11	19	30
TOTAL INSTANCES (for 549 people)	281	428	709

**This table presents reported instances, not individual people (see text above).*

***Chronic homelessness is defined according to the strict HUD definition (see text above).*

SURVEY INFORMATION ABOUT HOUSEHOLDS

Household Composition

Of the 3,792 households served on the night of the survey, 2,072 were in emergency shelters, and 1,720 were in transitional housing. A household may be made up of a single person, or two or more people. Nearly three-quarters (74%) of all households served were single adults. Most single adults (66 percent) were in emergency shelters.

Table 10a: Composition of Adult or Single Person households served

ADULT OR SINGLE PERSON HOUSEHOLD COMPOSITION	EMERGENCY SHELTER	TRANSITIONAL HOUSING	TOTAL
Single male	1,397	679	2,076
Single female	468	272	740
Unaccompanied minor (under 18)	12	40	52
TOTAL HOUSEHOLDS	1,885	992	2,877

A total of 915 households consisted of one or two parents with children (**Table 10b**). The great majority of households with children (80%) are in transitional housing, while 20% are in emergency shelters. Eighty percent of family households served were headed by a single parent; most of these were women. Eighteen percent of households with children were headed by two adults. A very small percent (one percent) of families with children were headed by minors. Due to a net gain of 49 units of transitional housing for families with children in 2007, it was possible for such programs to serve more homeless families than in the previous year.

Table 10b: Family household composition

FAMILY HOUSEHOLD COMPOSITION	EMERGENCY SHELTER	TRANSITIONAL HOUSING	TOTAL
Female head of household	127	583	710
Male head of household	11	19	30
Couple with children	47	116	163
Minor female head of household	2	10	12
TOTAL FAMILY HOUSEHOLDS	187	728	915

Household Income

Table 11 shows the Area Median Income (AMI) for King County for several household sizes. The median income in King County continues to rise. In 2008 the median income for a family of three is \$73,300 a year. For nearly seventy percent of the households surveyed in emergency shelters and transitional housing programs, their incomes were at or below 30 percent of the median income. For a family of three, that means managing on less than \$21,951 a year; for a single person, that is less than \$17,150. At this level of poverty it is extremely difficult to secure affordable housing. A one bedroom apartment in King County in 2006 rented for a fair market rate of \$710 a month. For such an apartment to be affordable (i.e., not cost more than 30% of household income), the renter household would need to earn \$28,400 a year.

Table 11: 2008 Area Median Income (AMI) and below by household size for King County

	1 PERSON	2 PEOPLE	3 PEOPLE	4 PEOPLE
Area Median Income	\$57,000	\$65,100	\$73,300	\$81,400
50% of AMI	\$28,500	\$32,550	\$36,650	\$40,700
30% of AMI	\$17,150	\$19,500	\$21,950	\$24,400

Source: U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development 2008 Income Guidelines for King County, WA (Revised 2/13/08)

Table 12: Income levels of households served in King County emergency shelters and transitional housing programs

	EMERGENCY SHELTER	TRANSITIONAL HOUSING	OVERALL PERCENTAGE	# OF HOUSEHOLDS
Zero Income	21%	12%	16%	620
Extremely Low Income ($\leq 30\%$ AMI)	46%	78%	60%	2,285
Very Low Income ($\leq 50\%$ AMI)	3%	>1%	4%	152
Greater than 50% AMI	>1%	1%	>1%	15
Unknown	32%	4%	19%	720
TOTAL NUMBER OF HOUSEHOLDS				3,792

NOTE: The 2008 survey was completed using 2007 AMI (the most recent then available). In 2007, AMI for one person was \$54,500; for a family of three it was \$70,100. See the 2007 One Night Count Report (www.homelessinfo.org) for complete 2007 AMI figures.

Primary Sources of Income for Households Served

Paid Employment was the primary source of income for nearly 20 percent of households served by emergency shelter and transitional housing programs. This survey only asked for primary sources of income; a higher proportion of households receive some monthly income from paid employment. Thirteen percent of households relied on welfare benefits (Temporary Assistance to Needy Families) as their main source of income. Sixteen percent of households had no source of income at all. For 17% of all households (mostly in emergency shelters), the primary source of income was unknown. See **Table 13** on following page.

Benefits Programs

The GAU payment for a single individual is \$339 a month. A married couple receives \$448 a month. A two person family receiving Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) in Washington may receive \$440. For a family of three, benefits are \$546 a month. The federal government sets the Washington standard SSI payment at \$637 a month for one person; a married couple receives \$956 a month.

Table 13 provides information on the reported primary sources of income for households. More than a quarter of all households (27%) received income primarily from one of the four main public benefit programs for people with disabilities: Supplemental Security Income (SSI), General Assistance to the Unemployable (GAU and GAX), and Alcohol and Drug Addiction Treatment and Support Act (ADATSA). Eligibility for these programs is based on proof of disability. People with disabilities who depend on programs such as SSI to meet their living expenses are especially vulnerable to rising housing costs.³

Table 13: Primary sources of income for households served

	EMERGENCY SHELTER	TRANSITIONAL HOUSING	ALL	# OF HOUSEHOLDS
Employment	14%	25%	19%	726
No source of income	21%	12%	16%	623
Supplemental Security Income (SSI)	14%	15%	14%	540
Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)	4%	24%	13%	493
General Assistance – Unemployable (GAU)	10%	9%	9%	358
Other source of income	5%	5%	5%	197
General Assistance – Unemployable (GAX)	3%	4%	3%	121
Alcohol and Drug Addiction Treatment and Support Act (ADATSA) Support	1%	1%	1%	36
Unemployment compensation	1%	1%	1%	35
Unknown	29%	4%	17%	663
TOTAL NUMBER OF HOUSEHOLDS				3,792

Last Permanent Address

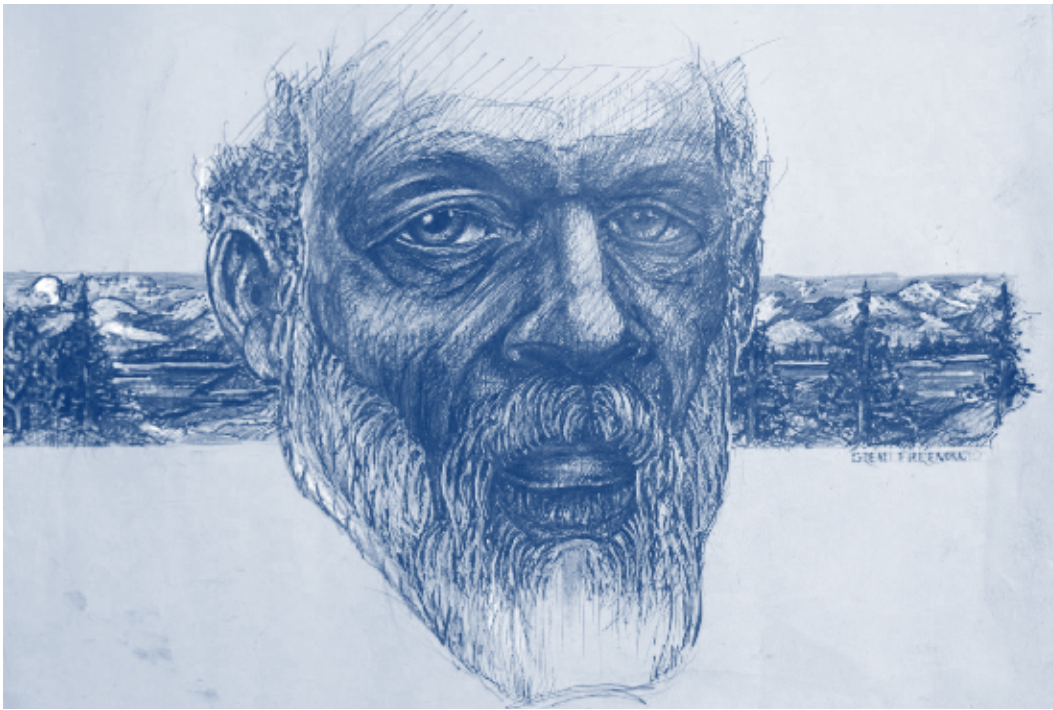
King County residents make up the vast majority of people served in local emergency shelters and transitional housing programs. The last permanent address for most households (nearly 80%) was a King County address. Altogether, Washington state residents made up 85% of households served during the One Night Count. These figures are comparable with previous years. More than half of the households for which a last address was known had last called Seattle home. A household's last permanent address is defined as the address where household members last lived for two months or more (this definition does not include time spent in transitional housing or in hospitals, jails, or foster care).

Table 14: Last permanent address of household

	# OF HOUSEHOLDS	EMERGENCY SHELTER	TRANSITIONAL HOUSING	TOTAL %
Seattle	1,772	60%	49%	55%
South King County	499	11%	20%	15%
East King County	178	4%	7%	5%
North King County	120	3%	5%	4%
King County subtotal	2,569			79%
Other Washington County	189	5%	7%	6%
Washington State subtotal	2,758			85%
Out of State	483	17%	12%	15%
TOTAL # OF HOUSEHOLDS FOR WHICH LAST ADDRESS KNOWN	3,241			100%
Unknown / Not monitored	551			N/A

³ For more information see *Priced Out in 2006: The Housing Crisis for People with Disabilities*, prepared by the Consortium for Citizens with Disabilities (CCD) Housing Task Force and the Technical Assistance Collaborative (TAC). This report describes the growing housing affordability crisis for SSI recipients. The report is available at: <http://www.tacinc.org/Pubs/PricedOut.htm>. In Washington state, a person receiving the average 2006 monthly SSI payment of \$649 would need to spend 97% of that check to afford an average one bedroom apartment; a studio would cost 85% of the benefits. There is no metropolitan area in Washington where a person living solely on SSI benefits is able to afford housing.

Artist Unknown



How long people have been homeless, and how often they have experienced homelessness

The length of time a household had been homeless (this episode) was reported for two thirds of all households served by reporting programs (2,493 households). For these households, **Table 15** shows how long the current episode of homelessness had lasted at the time of the survey. People in nearly 60% of all reported households had been homeless for under a year; forty percent of reported households had been homeless for less than six months.

Table 16 covers how many episodes of homelessness a household experienced during the past two years. This information is known for 42% of all households served. For the majority of households (56%) for which this information was reported, this was the only time they had been homeless in the last two years. But for 352 households (16% of those known), they were in the midst of their fourth (or more frequent) experience of homelessness in two years. Many programs do not routinely collect data about how long or how often a person or household has been homeless. In future years, it is likely that more programs will report this information.

Table 15: Length of time homeless (this episode) for households (where known)

	ONE WEEK OR LESS	1 WEEK TO 6 MONTHS	7 TO 11 MONTHS	12 TO 23 MONTHS	24 MONTHS OR LONGER	TOTAL KNOWN
# of Households	103	883	496	476	535	2,493
Proportion of HH where length of time homeless is known	4%	35%	20%	19%	21%	66%

Table 16: Frequency of homelessness within the last two years for households (where known)

	ONLY TIME	2ND TIME	3RD TIME	4TH TIME (OR MORE)	TOTAL KNOWN
# of Households	1,227	411	204	352	2,194
Proportion of HH where frequency of homelessness is known	56%	19%	9%	16%	58%



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS AND THANKS



Hundreds of agency staff and community volunteers, and hundreds of organizations and agencies cooperate in and support the One Night Count. King County Housing and Community Development's Homeless Housing Program administers the survey of shelter and transitional housing providers. We are deeply grateful to the providers who work to keep people safe, warm and dry in shelters and programs, and who in the midst of working to shelter people who have no homes, made time to complete the survey on the night of the count. The Seattle/King County Coalition on Homelessness (SKCCH) and Operation Nightwatch collaborate to organize the count of people without shelter. We salute the more than 900 volunteers who spent hours walking their count areas and completing tally sheets. Nursing and administrative staff at the following hospital emergency departments made it possible to include homeless people surviving the night inside their facilities: Group Health Eastside; Harborview Medical Center; Overlake Hospital; St. Francis Hospital; Swedish Medical Center; Valley Medical Center; Veterans' Administration Hospital. Staff of the Dutch Schisler Sobering Center also provided us with their homeless census on this night. The dedicated operators and staff at the Crisis Clinic's Community Information Line conducted a special survey related to the One Night Count. **THANK YOU ALL.**

We gratefully acknowledge major funding from the Committee to End Homelessness in King County (CEHKC). King County Housing and Community Development – Homeless Housing Program provided data and technical support (including survey implementation and analysis) for this report.

We acknowledge with deep gratitude sustaining commitment from the following organizations:

Aloha Inn (Archdiocesan Housing Authority)
Child Care Resources
Compass Center
Crisis Clinic
Downtown Emergency Service Center
Operation Nightwatch

Reverend Rick Reynolds and Ann Sakaguchi of Operation Nightwatch merit special thanks for their leadership and dedication to the One Night Count. Thank you to the talented Marty Jacobs, Linn Gould, Paula Dow, Sacha Hrabar, Chris Purdum, Katia Roberts, Tricia Schug, and Tim Summers for documenting in words and images the 2008 One Night Count. Thanks to Alisa Engnell, Stefanie Fox, Shayne Kraemer, and Jennifer Samnick for making unique contributions to this year's count.

Invaluable major contributions to the One Night Count of homeless people without shelter were made by: Doug McKeehan, Marty Sanders, and Dan Wise (Archdiocesan Housing Authority/Aloha Inn); Gretchen Bruce (Committee to End Homelessness in King County); Steve Anthony, Kris Breton, M] Kiser, Tom Phillips, Kim Sather, and Leslie Shapiro (Compass Center); Susan Gemmel, Emma Klein, and Troy Tady (Crisis Clinic/Community Information Line); Don Clayton, Raymond Hummel; Ken Tanzer, and Nicole Macri (DESC); Colby Bradley and Joshua Okrent (Low Income Housing Institute); Tamara Brown (Solid Ground); Julie Krippner (Seattle Youth Garden Works); Ben Curtis and Robin Desilet (Operation Nightwatch); Krista Grimm (Operation Sacklunch); Elaine Simons (Peace for the Streets by Kids from the Streets); and Nancy Amidei (UW School of Social Work).

Generous support for the Seattle volunteer breakfast was provided by The Beacon Development Group, Kantor Taylor McCarthy, and the United Way of King County. Extra helpings of thanks to John Platt and Cass Vaivadas (St. Cloud's Restaurant), and all breakfast volunteers.

Thank you to the extraordinary lead organizers of the 2008 Unsheltered Count in King County:

Kayla Sargent & Debbie Christian (Auburn Food Bank),
Pegi Moll and Dan McDougall-Treacey (Valley Cities
Counseling and Consultation) ~ Auburn

Meghan Altimore (Hopelink) ~ East Urban

Manuela Ginnett (Multi-Service Center) & Kelli O'Donnell
(City of Federal Way) ~ Federal Way

Amy Parshall, John Fisher, Anant Mehta, & Susan Vaughn
(Catholic Community Services) ~ Kent

Marvin Futrell, Michele Marchand, Randy Pellam
(SHARE/WHEEL) & Stefanie Fox ~ Night Owl Buses

George Smith (City of Shoreline) and Henry delle Chiaie
(Teen Hope) ~ North county

Anne Snook (Vision House) & Karen Bergsvik (City of Renton) ~
Renton

Marty Jacobs (Child Care Resources) ~ Seattle and
White Center

Laura Pritchard (University District Service Providers' Alliance) ~
University District

Salutations to Anitra L. Freeman and Whit Press for permission to reprint the poem "Sharing City Shelter" from the WHEEL Anthology *Beloved Community: The Sisterhood of Homeless Women in Poetry* (Whit Press, 2007).

Thanks to Tim Harris for rescuing the drawing on page 17.

Very special thanks to Jacqueline Bonelli at Bonelli Design for designing the 2008 One Night Count report with skill and heart. Thank you to Risa Blythe and Girlie Press, Inc. for donating a portion of the printing costs.



THIS REPORT IS AVAILABLE AS A .PDF FILE ON-LINE AT WWW.HOMELESSINFO.ORG

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King County

SURVEY ANALYSIS AND TECHNICAL SUPPORT:

KING COUNTY HOUSING AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT
– HOMELESS HOUSING PROGRAMS



COMMITTEE TO END
HOMELESSNESS
KING COUNTY

FUNDING:

COMMITTEE TO END HOMELESSNESS
IN KING COUNTY (CEHKC)

OUR MISSION:

The Seattle/King County Coalition on Homelessness (SKCCH) works collaboratively to ensure the safety and survival of people who are homeless and to end the crisis of homelessness in our region.

