

**HOMELESSNESS IN THE DENVER METROPOLITAN AREA
A BASE LINE POINT IN TIME STUDY
JUNE 15, 1998**

*A Collaborative Effort Between
The Metropolitan Denver Homeless Initiative
&
The State of Colorado*

by

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Homelessness In The Denver Metropolitan Area A Base Line Point In Time Study: June 1998 A Collaborative Effort Between The Metropolitan Denver Homeless Initiative & The State of Colorado

by Tracy A. D'Alanno

Colorado Coordinating Council on Housing and the Homeless

The Denver Metropolitan area has worked for the past four years to develop a comprehensive system of housing and services for homeless persons. The development of this system has been facilitated by the Metropolitan Denver Homeless Initiative (MDHI). Designing and implementing a comprehensive homeless system requires on-going accurate information on the numbers and demographic characteristics of homeless persons residing in this geographic region. This research project concentrated on counting homeless persons in Adams, Arapahoe, Boulder, Denver, Douglas and Jefferson counties.

The Colorado Department of Human Services, Supportive Housing and Homeless Programs (SHHP) on behalf of MDHI agreed to conduct a census count of homeless persons in the six county region. The census count was completed by utilizing the Homeless Information System (HIS) software program developed by the departments' Computerized Homeless Information and Referral Project (CHIRP).

Throughout the day and evening of June 15, 1998, this study was completed on the streets, in emergency shelters, transitional housing projects, food lines, day shelters, homeless treatment programs, and homeless work programs. Guidelines and requirements established by the federal government were used to conduct an enumeration of the homeless population. The federal definition includes homeless persons with emergency housing and service needs, as well as, homeless persons who are receiving transitional housing and services. Persons residing in transitional housing were not counted as needing emergency services. In addition, the Department of Housing and Urban Development requires a count of formerly homeless persons residing in federally funded permanent supportive housing programs for persons with special needs. Three hundred and forty one persons, who are currently residing in permanent supportive housing programs for homeless persons with disabilities, were also included in the overall count. Persons residing in permanent supportive housing programs were not counted as homeless. This group was counted in order to help MDHI analyze current homeless system capacity in providing appropriate supported housing to homeless persons with mental illness, physical disabilities, HIV/AIDS, and other special needs and to meet federal documentation requirements.

Persons were also counted as homeless who lacked a permanent place to live, were using services for the indigent, were living in welfare hotels or motels, and were doubled up temporarily with family or friends and identified themselves as being homeless and were therefore requesting emergency shelter and services. Persons in any of these places who reported that they had a permanent place to live, were not counted as homeless.

A total of 6,133 persons in the metropolitan area were counted on June 15, 1998. Of those, 341 persons were receiving permanent supportive housing, resulting in a total homeless person count of 5,792. Of the total persons counted 2,852 were single adults, 1,151 were adults in families, over one-third were -- 1,933 -- were children in families, and 197 were single youth on their own.

On June 15, 1998, 3,908 persons or 64% of the population counted had a need for emergency shelter and services. These persons lacked a permanent place of their own and were sleeping in emergency shelters, on the streets, were doubled up with family or friends, were staying night-to-night at welfare hotels, were coming out of institutions, or staying in other places not fit for human habitation. Persons receiving transitional services or permanent supportive services are not included in this figure.

A total of 1,517 persons or 25% of the population counted are participants in homeless transitional housing programs or treatment programs. A total of 341 persons or 5% were formerly homeless persons who were counted as residing in permanent supportive housing programs. A total of 367 persons or 6% did not report where they spent last night, so no assumptions can be made as to what type of housing they would need.

This is a point in time survey that indicates how many people are homeless at that given point in time. Point prevalence is important in determining the current need for emergency shelter beds, food, and clothing. However, an annual prevalence or how many homeless persons there are over the course of a year is important in determining the on-going supportive housing, job training, educational, and permanent housing needs of homeless persons. Results of this survey suggest that the annual prevalence of homelessness in the Denver metropolitan area is close to 16,800 persons each year.

Changes in the definitions of homelessness, in the homeless service delivery system, counting methodologies, as well as seasonal factors make accurate comparisons to earlier studies difficult. Earlier studies were completed using sampling methodology that did not attempt to complete an actual census count on homeless persons. In addition, the 1998 study made a concerted effort to gain participation from all known providers of homeless services in the six county metropolitan area, which increased the number of opportunities to find homeless persons that were included in this count. Finally, this study completed surveys on families and individuals who called homeless providers requesting emergency shelter. Since previous studies did not complete questionnaires from people who were calling and requesting assistance, it is likely that more homeless persons were found. Regardless of the different methodologies utilized to estimate the number of homeless persons at any given time, there has undoubtedly been a significant increase in the number of homeless persons in the Denver metropolitan area over the past ten years.

A study conducted by Dr. Franklin James in August of 1995 estimated that there were a total of 3,330 persons homeless at that point in time.¹ The researcher maintains that it is unlikely that homelessness has actually increased by almost 60% from 3,330 to 5,792 over the past three years. What is more probable is that by increasing the number of locations where

¹ Franklin J. James, "Patterns of Homelessness in the Denver Metropolitan Area: August, 1995." Denver: Graduate School of Public Affairs, April 1996 (revised).

homeless persons were surveyed and by conducting surveys over the telephone led to a higher count than what was achieved in 1995.

As in previous studies, homelessness among children in families continues to be one of the fastest growing segments of the homeless population in the Denver metropolitan area. The number of homeless children in families grew by 180 percent between 1990 and 1995.² The 1995 homeless survey by Dr. Franklin James counted a total of 1,050 children and this survey counted a total of 1,931 homeless children, an increase of 83%. Between 1995 and 1998 homelessness among adults increased by 51%.

While the booming economy within the state of Colorado brings with it growing employment opportunities and other economic benefits, it has also contributed to a severe lack of affordable housing. The primary reason individuals and families reported becoming homeless related directly to their inability to pay rent or mortgage and as a result became homeless due to eviction or foreclosure. Unfortunately, economic growth has contributed to a severe lack of affordable housing, resulting in housing vacancy rates as low as 2% throughout the Denver metropolitan area. Due to low vacancy rates, housing costs have risen dramatically forcing many individuals and families to become homeless.

In addition, fourteen percent or 727 of the persons surveyed reported that their last permanent address was outside of the state of Colorado. Clearly, many people are migrating to the state looking for employment opportunities. However, according to the Colorado Department of Labor and Employment, fifty percent of all the jobs in Colorado were in the retail, agricultural and service trades. These trades have the lowest average annual wages and are increasing at a faster rate than other employment as a whole.³ According to the Colorado Coalition for the Homeless, there are 450,000 Colorado households that make less than \$17,500 per year. A family would need a base annual income of at least \$23,865 to pay for a two bedroom unit. Finally, a minimum wage worker in Colorado would need to work 89 hours each week to afford a two bedroom apartment in the Denver metropolitan area.⁴ It is likely that as the population in Colorado continues to grow and as long as housing vacancy rates remain low and housing costs remain high, the Denver metropolitan area will continue to see a growing homeless population.

The Metropolitan Denver Homeless Initiative has made some significant progress in implementing a coordinated system of housing and service delivery for homeless individuals, families and youth. Unfortunately, the demand for services has significantly outpaced the region's capacity to meet those needs. There are simply not enough resources to meet an annual estimated prevalence of up to 16,800 homeless persons per year. Emergency shelters throughout the metropolitan area now have waiting lists and/or conduct lotteries to give away beds at night. Families with children are now being forced to sleep in their cars, in bus stations, and in parks.

² Franklin J. James, "Patterns of Homelessness in the Denver Metropolitan Area: August, 1995." Denver: Graduate School of Public Affairs, April 1996 (revised).

³ Source: Colorado Employment and Wages, Annual Average 1990-1996.

⁴ Source: Colorado Coalition for the Homeless

INTRODUCTION

The Denver Metropolitan area has worked for the past four years to develop a comprehensive system of housing and services for homeless persons. The development of this system has been facilitated by the Metropolitan Denver Homeless Initiative (MDHI). Over the past four years MDHI has worked with over four hundred and fifty stakeholders to define and begin implementing a system that includes emergency housing and services, transitional housing and services and permanent housing and services for homeless families, individuals and youth. The homeless system has been designed to work throughout the six county Denver metropolitan area. Designing and implementing a comprehensive homeless system requires on-going accurate information on the numbers and demographic characteristics of homeless persons residing in this geographic region. Therefore, this research project concentrated on counting homeless persons in Adams, Arapahoe, Boulder, Denver, Douglas, and Jefferson counties.

The Colorado Department of Human Services, Supportive Housing and Homeless Programs (SHHP) is an active participant in MDHI. As an active participant, SHHP agreed to conduct a census count of homeless persons in the six county region. The census count was completed by utilizing the Homeless Information System (HIS) software program developed by the departments' Computerized Homeless Information and Referral Project (CHIRP).

Throughout the day and evening of June 15, 1998, a homeless census count/demographic study was conducted in Denver and throughout the five surrounding suburban counties. The study was completed on the streets, in emergency shelters, transitional housing projects, food lines, day shelters, homeless treatment programs, and homeless work programs. Three hundred and forty one persons, who are currently residing in permanent supportive housing programs for homeless persons with disabilities, were also included in the overall count. This group was counted in order to help MDHI analyze current homeless system capacity in providing appropriate supported housing to homeless persons with mental illness, physical disabilities, HIV/AIDS, and other special needs and to meet federal documentation requirements.

Methods utilized by this study included the distribution of questionnaires generated by the (HIS) intake software program. Questionnaires were distributed to homeless agencies, county departments of social services, and human service agencies, which serve the homeless. Questionnaires were completed either through case manager interviews with homeless persons or individually by homeless persons themselves. In addition, homeless providers currently utilizing the HIS software program participated by saving information they collected on homeless persons they were currently serving on June 15 to a disc. This information was then aggregated with the information collected on the distributed forms. Each person counted was assigned a unique identifier based on age, ethnicity, last permanent address, sex, and marital status to gain an unduplicated count. Methods used in this survey are described in Appendix A. The questionnaire used in the interviews and filled out by homeless persons is presented in Appendix B. The questionnaire used to collect information by providers utilizing the HIS program is presented in Appendix B-1, which simply includes additional questions for information not collected by this research project.

This is a base line study that cannot be compared accurately to previous studies of homelessness in Colorado. Earlier studies were completed using sampling methodology that did not attempt to complete an actual census count on homeless persons.

The goals of the 1998 survey were to:

- to provide a comprehensive census count of the homeless population in the metropolitan area on June 15, 1998;
- to document actual demographic characteristics of the homeless population;
- to determine the last permanent residence of homeless persons to better determine needs within each county;
- to determine where homeless persons spent last night to analyze system capacity and review patterns of mobility of the homeless;
- to meet research requirements for the Department of Housing and Urban Development for the annual Homeless Notice of Funding Availability;
- to differentiate the needs of homeless persons for emergency housing, transitional housing, permanent housing;
- to differentiate the needs of homeless persons for appropriate services like job training, child care, education, food, domestic violence counseling, and employment assistance.

It should be noted that this study was not able to document specific service needs of the homeless for mental health treatment, substance abuse services, and HIV/AIDS services.

DEFINING THE HOMELESS

Guidelines and requirements established by the federal government were used to conduct an enumeration of the homeless population. The federal definition includes homeless persons with emergency housing and service needs, as well as, homeless persons who are receiving transitional housing and services. Persons residing in transitional housing were not counted as needing emergency services. In addition, the Department of Housing and Urban Development requires a count of formerly homeless persons residing in federally funded permanent supportive housing programs for persons with special needs. Persons residing in permanent supportive housing programs were not counted as homeless. However, the Department of Housing and Urban Development requires that persons residing in transitional housing and permanent supportive housing be included in the overall counts of the homeless in order to take into account their needs for either permanent housing or for continued case management and services required for persons to reach a maximum point of personal self-sufficiency. Finally, a comprehensive analysis of the service delivery system is not possible without first understanding who is currently being served by the system. In order to obtain a true count of gaps in the housing and service delivery system, the following formula is used:

Total # of Persons Estimated Need	Total # of housing/service units Current Inventory	$(\text{Need}) - (\text{Inventory}) = \text{Gaps}$ Unmet Need
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Persons were also counted as homeless who lacked a permanent place to live, were using services for the indigent, were living in welfare hotels or motels, and were doubled up temporarily with family or friends and identified themselves as being homeless and were

therefore requesting emergency shelter and services. Persons in any of these places, who reported that they had a permanent place to live, were not counted as homeless.

OVERALL NUMBERS OF HOMELESS

A total of 6,133 persons in the metropolitan area were counted on June 15, 1998. Of those, 341 persons were receiving permanent supportive housing, resulting in a total homeless person count of **5,792**. Of the total persons counted 2,852 were single adults, 1,151 were adults in families, over one-third were -- 1,933 -- were children in families, and 197 were single youth on their own.

On June 15, 1998, 3,908 persons or 64% of the population counted had a need for emergency shelter and services. These persons lacked a permanent place of their own and were sleeping in emergency shelters, on the streets, were doubled up with family or friends, were staying night-to-night at welfare hotels, were coming out of institutions, or staying in other places not fit for human habitation. Persons receiving transitional services or permanent supportive services are not included in this figure.

A total of 1,517 persons or 25% of the population counted are participants in homeless transitional housing programs or treatment programs. A total of 341 persons or 5% were formerly homeless persons who were counted as residing in permanent supportive housing programs. A total of 367 persons or 6% did not report where they spent last night, so no assumptions can be made as to what type of housing they would need.

TRENDS IN HOMELESSNESS

This base line study cannot be compared directly to previous Denver metro homeless studies conducted by Dr. Franklin James of the Graduate School of Public Affairs in 1988, 1990, and 1995.⁵ Changes in the definitions of homelessness, in the homeless service delivery system, counting methodologies, as well as seasonal factors make accurate comparisons difficult. However, this study does continue to show a marked increase in the number of persons becoming homeless and looking for emergency and transitional housing assistance.

Counts of the homeless conducted in 1988 and 1990 focused on identifying homeless persons with emergency needs. However, it should be noted that transitional and permanent supportive housing programs were extremely limited so that homeless persons in 1988 through 1990 generally were in need of emergency services as the only option available. By 1995, MDHI had successfully begun the implementation of a more coordinated homeless service delivery system and had significantly expanded the transitional housing system. Therefore, the 1995 research counted residents of transitional housing programs.

In addition, the 1988 and 1990 studies were completed in April; the 1995 study was conducted in August and the 1998 study was completed in June. Seasonal patterns as to whether the homeless population is higher or lower in any one of these months has never been accurately identified.

⁵ For additional information see Franklin J. James, "Patterns of Homelessness in the Denver Metropolitan Area," (Denver: Graduate School of Public Affairs, CU-Denver, August 1995)

Finally, the 1988, 1990 and 1995 studies were conducted using cluster-sampling methods to estimate the homeless population in shelters, food lines, and in transitional housing.⁶ The 1998 base line study is an actual census count of the homeless population using intake and assessment questionnaires and software developed in an ACCESS data base to aggregate collected information. In addition, the 1998 study made a concerted effort to gain participation from any human service agency that may make contact with homeless persons in the six county metropolitan area. This methodology certainly increased the number of opportunities to find homeless persons that were included in this count. Finally, this study completed surveys on families and individuals who called homeless providers requesting emergency shelter. Since previous studies did not complete questionnaires from people who were calling and requesting assistance, it is likely that more homeless persons were found. Regardless of the different methodologies utilized to estimate the number of homeless persons at any given time, there has undoubtedly been a significant increase in the number of homeless persons in the Denver metropolitan area over the past ten years. The total number of persons counted in each study are as follows:

	1988 ^a	1990 ^a	1995 ^a	1998	
				Total Counted 1998 ^b	With emergency and transitional needs ^{b-1}
Adults	1,550	1,610	2,280	4,003	3,664
Children	265	375	1,050	1,933	1,931
Youth	^c	^c	^c	197	197
Total	1,815	1,985	3,330	6,133	5,792

The researcher maintains that it is unlikely that homelessness has actually increased by almost 60% from 3,330 to 5,792 over the past three years. What is more probable is that by increasing the number of locations where homeless persons were surveyed led to a higher count than what was achieved in 1995. See Table A and Table A-1 for a comparison of locations surveyed in 1995 and 1998. See Table A-2 for client counts by homeless service agency. In addition, individuals and families who called homeless providers requesting emergency housing assistance, and who indicated that they were homeless, were included in the survey. Previous surveys did not collect information from homeless persons requesting assistance via the telephone. In order to prevent a duplicate count, each person either interviewed by telephone or in person was assigned a unique identifier based on age, ethnicity, last permanent address, sex, and marital status.

⁶ Franklin J. James, "New Methods for Measuring Homelessness and the Population at Risk: Exploratory Research in Colorado," Social Work Research and Abstracts, Volume 28, Number 2, June 1992, pp. 9-14. Franklin J. James "Counting Homeless Persons with Surveys of Users of Services for the Homeless", Housing Policy Debate, Volume 2, Issue 3, 1991, pp. 733-753. Franklin J. James, "Techniques for Estimating the Size of the Homeless Population in Colorado", in U.S. Bureau of the Census, Enumerating Homeless Persons: Methods and Data Needs: Washington, D.C., U.S. Department of Commerce, March 1991.

^a SOURCE: Franklin J. James, "Patterns of Homelessness in the Denver Metropolitan Area: August, 1995." Denver: Graduate School of Public Affairs, April 1996 (revised).

^b Indicates total persons counted in 1998, including 555 persons living in permanent supportive housing.

^{b-1} Indicates total number of homeless persons counted.

^c No separate estimates of homeless youth on their own are available. The 1998, 1990, and 1995 studies did not differentiate single adults from homeless youth.

REASONS FOR HOMELESSNESS

For the past three years, the State of Colorado has been experiencing a tremendous growth in its economy. Unfortunately, economic growth has contributed to a severe lack of affordable housing, resulting in housing vacancy rates as low as 2% throughout the Denver metropolitan area. Due to low vacancy rates, housing costs have risen dramatically forcing many individuals and families to become homeless. In addition, positive reports regarding Colorado's economy acted as a catalyst for encouraging individuals and families to move here looking for employment. In fact, 14% of those responding to this study reported that their last permanent address was outside of Colorado. It is likely that many homeless persons who moved to Colorado looking for employment could either not find appropriate employment, or could only find minimum wage jobs, thus contributing to an additional increase in homelessness.

The top reasons respondents reported for becoming homeless included the following:

- Unable to pay rent or mortgage and eviction or foreclosure
- Unemployment
- Alcohol or substance abuse
- Domestic violence
- Moved to seek work
- Mental illness

It is likely that as the population in Colorado continues to grow, and as long as housing vacancy rates remain low and housing costs remain high, the Denver metropolitan area will continue to see a growing homeless population.

DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS

Homelessness Among Children

As in previous studies, homelessness among children in families continues to be one of the fastest growing segments of the homeless population in the Denver metropolitan area. The number of homeless children in families grew by 180 percent between 1990 and 1995.⁷ The 1995 homeless survey by Dr. Franklin James counted a total of 1,050 children and this survey counted 1,931 homeless children, an increase of 83%. Between 1995 and 1998 homelessness among adults increased by 51%. While this study did not attempt to determine the long term affects of homelessness on children, the lack of a stable living environment, appropriate health care and nutrition, and the on-going educational impacts could certainly be considered detrimental to a child's sense of well being and future stability. According to the *Journal of Children & Poverty*, sixty-two percent of homeless children are reading below grade level, seventy-eight percent are performing below grade level in math, twenty-four percent have been placed in special education, and thirty-seven percent have repeated a grade. Early intervention, intensive case management and services along with transitional

⁷ Franklin J. James, "Patterns of Homelessness in the Denver Metropolitan Area," (Denver: Graduate School of Public Affairs, CU-Denver, August 1995)

housing become of prime importance in ensuring that we break the cycle of poverty and homelessness for the future for these children.⁸

The age break down of children in families surveyed is important for understanding the child care and educational needs of homeless families in the Denver metropolitan area. Eight hundred and fifty four children surveyed were under the age of six, with eight percent under the age of 1 and thirty-six percent between the ages of 1 and 5. If the parents of these children are expected to work or attend educational programs, then these children will be in need of child care. In addition, forty percent of the families surveyed indicated that they had children between the ages of 6 and 12, and sixteen percent had children between the ages of 13 and 17. Public school systems need to be made aware of the special educational and emotional needs of these children.

Homelessness Among Families

Nine hundred and twenty eight families were surveyed which included a total of 3,084 persons. One family was residing in a permanent supportive housing program and is therefore not counted as homeless. The total count for the number of homeless persons in families is 3,081. Seventy-three percent of the families interviewed were one parent families, twenty-two percent were two parent families, and five percent were couples with no children. Of the single parent families, approximately 98% were headed by single women.

The age break down of homelessness among adults in families shows that forty-seven percent of the adults were between the ages of 18 and 30. Fifty percent were between the ages of 31 and 50 and three percent were 51 or older. Seventy-seven percent of the adults in families were female with only twenty-three percent of the adults in families being male.

Homelessness Among Single Adults

The age break down of homelessness among single adults shows that twenty-one percent were between the ages of 18 and 30. This is significantly less than the forty-seven percent of adults in families for the same age group. Sixty-three percent of single adults were between the ages of 31 and 50 in comparison to the fifty percent of adults in families for this age group. Finally, fifteen percent were 51 or older in comparison to the three percent of adults in families for the same age group. This demographic information indicates that homeless single individuals not in families are significantly older than their adult counter parts in families. In direct contrast to homeless families, males comprise a total of sixty-nine percent of homeless single adults where women comprise approximately seventy-seven percent of adults in homeless families. A total of 934 single homeless women were counted. This population, as characterized by the agencies that serve them, tend to be more vulnerable on the streets, have less emergency shelter options available, and tend to have a higher percentage of mental illness associated with their homelessness.

Homeless Youth On Their Own

This survey found 197 single homeless youth under the age of 18 living on their own. In addition, there were 110 families headed by youth under the age of twenty-one with children of their own. This included 16 families headed by youth 18 years of age or younger. Ninety-

⁸ Ralph da Costa Nunez, "Journal of Children & Poverty: The Future of Violence Among Homeless Children in America," Volume 4, Number 1, Winter/Spring 1998. Institute for Children and Poverty, New York, New York.

three percent of the 110 families were headed by single females. It should be noted that counting homeless youth on their own is difficult because they do not access traditional homeless service delivery systems. It is likely, that this is a significant undercount of homeless youth on their own. For more information on homeless youth please see the following report by: Franklin J. James, Ph.D. "Homelessness Among Youth on their Own is a Serious Problem for Colorado" (Denver: Graduate School of Public Affairs, CU-Denver, February 1992).

Race and Ethnicity

The racial and ethnic composition of the region's homeless population breaks down into sixty-eight percent White, of which thirty-two percent reported being Hispanic.

Approximately one in four or twenty-three percent were Black, of which two percent reported being Hispanic. Approximately one in twenty or five percent were Native American, of which sixteen percent reported being Hispanic. Finally, approximately one percent was Asian/Pacific Islander with less than one percent who reported being Hispanic.

Level of Education Achieved

The following information was accomplished by extrapolating highest levels of education reported by adult single individuals and adult primaries in families. The following table illustrates levels of education achieved by homeless adults in this region. One thousand one hundred and twenty three persons or thirty percent reported less than a high school education or had not completed high school or gotten a GED. Thirty-nine percent reported having graduated from high school or receiving their GED. A full thirty percent reported having completed some form of higher education. This breakdown should be helpful to providers, when planning for the educational, job training, and employment assistance needs of homeless adults.

HIGHEST LEVEL OF EDUCATION	TOTAL PERSONS	PERCENT
Less Than High School	373	10%
Some High School	750	20%
Sub-Total Non-High School Graduate	1,123	30%
GED	512	14%
High School Graduate	950	25%
Sub-Total High School Graduate	1,462	39%
Some College	713	19%
Technical College	109	3%
Associate Degree	127	3%
BA/BS	134	4%
MA/MS	22	1%
Doctorate	3	--
Sub-Total Higher Education	1,108	30%
Other	34	1%

LENGTH AND FREQUENCY OF HOMELESSNESS

It has long been believed that persons who are homeless cycle in and out of homelessness and that most homeless persons have been homeless for a long period of time. As in the 1995 study by Dr. Franklin James, this base line study found that fifty percent or half of the

persons interviewed had never been homeless before.⁹ In addition, a full forty-eight percent reported that they had been homeless for less than 90 days. Quite obviously, the trend of frequent turnover among the homeless population has continued. Therefore, the current homeless service delivery system must be prepared to handle new homeless individuals and families as the need arises. In addition, clearly more focus needs to be placed in the area of homeless prevention. Prevention activities could significantly decrease the number of families and individuals experiencing homelessness. Twenty-seven percent reported having been homeless once and eleven percent reported being homeless for the second time. Approximately only 1 in 8 or thirteen percent reported having been homeless three or more times.

This is a point in time survey that indicates how many people are homeless at that given point in time. Point prevalence is important in determining the current need for emergency shelter beds, food, and clothing. However, an annual prevalence or how many homeless persons there are over the course of a year is important in determining the on-going supportive housing, job training, educational, and permanent housing needs of homeless persons. A rough estimate can be made by summing up the point prevalence of --5,792 --plus the number of new cases emerging each month, approximately 925 X 12 months, for an approximate total annual prevalence of 16,892 persons each year.¹⁰ However, this is a rough estimate and it would be necessary to conduct either ongoing census counts or at least quarterly census counts to determine if the monthly new case estimate is an accurate figure. MDHI is considering sponsoring bi-annual census counts that would more accurately portray trends among the homeless population throughout the metropolitan area.

LAST PERMANENT RESIDENCE

In order to determine where homeless individuals and families were coming from, respondents were asked to identify their last permanent address. A total of 988 persons did not answer this question. This problem with the data collection process became apparent only after the data was entered. The next survey will need to address this under reporting issue in order to gain a more accurate analysis of where persons were when they became homeless. The following information is based upon only those respondents who provided a clear answer. Thirty-eight percent of those responding to this question indicated that their last permanent address was in the city or county of Denver. The largest percentage at forty-three percent indicated they had come from one of the surrounding five counties (Adams, Arapahoe, Boulder, Douglas, Jefferson Counties). Five percent reported their last permanent address within Colorado, but outside of the Denver metropolitan area. Finally, 727 people or fourteen percent reported their last permanent address as somewhere outside the state of Colorado. The actual breakdown is as follows:

⁹ Franklin J. James, "Patterns of Homelessness in the Denver Metropolitan Area: August, 1995." Denver: Graduate School of Public Affairs, April 1996 (revised).

¹⁰ At the time of the June survey, 925 total homeless persons had been homeless one month or less. The estimate of annual prevalence assumes the number of new cases each month is constant over the year, yielding (12X 925) or about 11,100 new cases over the year plus the sum of the point prevalence 5,792.

LAST PERMANENT RESIDENCE - Those Reporting

Last Permanent Residence	Number	Percent
Denver	1,960	38%
Suburban	2,204	43%
Jefferson	970	19%
Adams	439	9%
Boulder	434	8%
Arapahoe	344	7%
Douglas	17	--
Colorado Rural	254	5%
Outside of Colorado	727	14%

While sixty-two percent of the homeless population came from either the metropolitan area, the rest of the state, or outside Colorado, a total of fifty-nine percent are actually located in and are receiving services in Denver. This is not surprising given the fact that Denver is the primary city in the state. Transportation, employment, emergency shelter services, and other human services are more easily accessible in Denver than in other parts of the metropolitan area.

It should be noted that the suburbs are playing an increasingly more significant role in meeting the housing and service needs of the homeless. The development of transitional and permanent supportive housing programs are being scattered throughout the region. Homeless task forces have been established in Adams, Jefferson, Boulder, and Arapahoe counties to take a concerted look at dealing with homeless persons in their community. Finally, the Arapahoe and Jefferson Public School systems are becoming increasingly concerned about meeting the educational needs of homeless students within their jurisdictions.

Furthermore, The Metropolitan Denver Homeless Initiative has made a concerted effort to disperse housing and services for homeless individuals and families throughout the six county metropolitan area. While emergency shelter and services have been traditionally located in the city and county of Denver, a balance of jurisdictional responsibility is starting to be achieved by the development of new transitional housing programs in Jefferson, Adams, Arapahoe, and Boulder counties. In addition, suburban counties are now working together to find a cooperative solution to meeting the emergency shelter needs of homeless persons who are not being served due to a lack of capacity. Distributing responsibility for providing homeless services throughout each region promotes jurisdictional accountability and helps homeless persons maintain critical relationships within their home communities.

Too often, a homeless family is forced to migrate to Denver to receive emergency housing and services. Parents are forced to move further away from their places of employment and children are forced to transfer to new school districts, only to be moved again when a more permanent housing situation is found. In addition, individuals with mental illness who are forced to move to Denver to find emergency shelter, lose contact with the services they may have been receiving from the mental health center in their home community. This lack of continuity only further hinders an individuals or families ability to work toward self-sufficiency.

WHERE HOMELESS PERSONS SLEEP AT NIGHT

A lack of capacity in the current emergency, transitional and affordable permanent housing stock has forced individuals and families to become creative in finding places to stay. Results of this survey indicate that thirty percent of the homeless population were sleeping in shelters. Fourteen percent of homeless persons interviewed were staying with family or friends, ten percent were sleeping on the streets or were living in their car, and five percent were living in hotels and motels. Working individuals and families forced to live in daily and weekly rate motels find it hard to save enough money to move into a permanent place of their own. The daily hotel rate and the necessity of having to eat out drains away any money earned, leaving little or nothing to put away for a damage deposit and first and last months rent.

In addition, forty-nine persons interviewed indicated that they had spent last night in the hospital. The Denver metropolitan area does not have a respite facility that can provide homeless persons with the type of care they need when being released from hospitals. Consequently, homeless persons who may require a bed in which to recover from surgery or a major illness have few options available to them.

In addition, forty-seven persons reported that they spent last night in jail or prison. This is a significant number of persons being released daily to the streets, and an issue that should be addressed by the judicial system and the homeless service delivery system. Furthermore, forty-seven persons reported that they were involved in a domestic violence situation the previous evening. This number does not even take into account the number of persons who reported they spent the previous evening in shelters, on the streets, or in hotels or motels, but who also may have been forced into this situation as a result of domestic violence. Clearly, a large number of persons are being displaced on any given day because of domestic violence.

Finally, only twenty-four percent of homeless persons interviewed reported being housed in a transitional housing program. Transitional housing programs provide participants with job training, employment assistance, case management, basic living skills, and other services necessary for helping people transition into and maintain permanent housing. If we are to make any progress at all in providing opportunities for individuals and families to become self-sufficient, the number of transitional housing units available will need to be increased.

A total of 463 persons interviewed reported having spent last night in rental housing. It is unclear whether that number of persons became homeless on June 15, or whether they were staying with family or friends and were being forced to move out, or were being displaced as a result of domestic violence. Interviews with the providers who took surveys from this population indicated that this number reflects the “new” homeless or persons who were not homeless the previous night but were requesting homeless assistance on June 15. Providers interviewed indicated that the middle of the month and the end of the month are typically when most evictions and foreclosures occur. Future studies will need to examine the relationship of where persons reported staying last night and the number of new homeless persons becoming homeless on any given day.

CONCLUSIONS

Homelessness in the metropolitan area continues to grow. The impact of homelessness on children and families is an issue that should be taken seriously by the public school systems, state government and legislators, and the local governments which work to ensure that the people of Colorado have a healthy environment with which to raise our children.

While the booming economy within the state of Colorado brings with it growing employment opportunities and other economic benefits, it has also contributed to a severe lack of affordable housing. The primary reason individuals and families reported becoming homeless related directly to their inability to pay rent or mortgage and therefore became homeless due to eviction or foreclosure. According to the Colorado Coalition for the Homeless, 450,000 Colorado households make less than \$17,500 per year.¹¹ Unfortunately, a family would need a base annual income of at least \$23,865 to pay for a two bedroom unit. Finally, a minimum wage worker in Colorado would need to work 89 hours each week to afford a two bedroom apartment in the Denver metropolitan area.

In addition, families on public assistance receive a maximum Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) grant of \$356 per month for a mother and 2 children. The Fair Market Rent in the Denver metropolitan area for a two bedroom home is \$637. Obviously, families receiving TANF funds cannot afford current housing costs in any county across the metropolitan region and are at high risk for homelessness.

Furthermore, homeless persons tend to work in low paying minimum wage jobs that also do not provide health insurance benefits. Fourteen percent or 727 people reported that their last permanent address was outside of the state of Colorado. Clearly, many people are migrating to the state looking for employment opportunities. According to the Colorado Department of Labor and Employment, fifty percent of all the jobs in Colorado were in the retail, agricultural and service trades. These trades have the lowest average annual wages and are increasing at a faster rate than other employment as a whole.¹²

The Metropolitan Denver Homeless Initiative has made some significant progress in implementing a coordinated system of housing and service delivery for homeless individuals, families and youth. Unfortunately, the demand for services has significantly outpaced the region's capacity to meet those needs. There are simply not enough resources to meet an annual estimated prevalence of over 16,800 homeless persons per year. Emergency shelters throughout the metropolitan area now have waiting lists and/or conduct lotteries to give away beds at night. Families with children are now being forced to sleep in their cars, in bus stations, and in parks.

¹¹ Source: The Colorado Coalition for the Homeless

¹² Source: Colorado Employment and Wages, Annual Average 1990-1996.

APPENDIX A: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The methodologies used to estimate the number of homeless persons on June 15, 1998, in the six county Denver metropolitan area were developed by The Colorado Department of Human Services based upon the Computerized Homeless Information and Referral Project (CHIRP). The CHIRP project facilitated the development of a homeless computerized intake and assessment system called the Homeless Information System (HIS). HIS is a software program that homeless providers can utilize to gather demographic and statistical information regarding the homeless populations they are serving. This research project encompassed a six county geographic region that included Adams, Arapahoe, Boulder, Denver, Douglas, and Jefferson counties.

In order to gain an accurate enumeration of the number of homeless persons in the Denver metropolitan area, comprehensive surveys were conducted by agencies that serve the homeless. Participating agencies included emergency shelters, day shelters, transitional housing facilities, soup kitchens, homeless clinics, county departments of social services, housing authorities, and homeless permanent supportive housing programs funded by the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). In addition, mobile outreach teams from the Colorado Coalition for the Homeless, the Boulder Homeless Shelter, and the Salvation Army conducted outreach surveys to persons sleeping on the streets or other public places.

Survey Procedures

The Metropolitan Denver Homeless Initiative (MDHI) Research Committee met in May of 1998 and decided that a metropolitan census count of the homeless would need to be conducted in June of 1998. The purpose of the survey was to gather statistical information needed by the initiative to facilitate system planning and to accurately complete statistical and demographic information required by HUD for the annual homeless funding application. It was determined at this meeting that the most cost effective and efficient way of gaining an accurate count was to utilize questionnaires developed by the CHIRP project for the HIS application. It was also determined that the HIS questionnaire was too comprehensive for a single point in time count, so the questionnaire was revised by a committee of homeless providers to gather a smaller set of data that could still be aggregated by the software program.

Revised questionnaires were distributed by mail to over four hundred service agencies on May 26, 1998. Questionnaires included attachments with detailed instructions for completing the survey and times and date for two training sessions. See appendix C for instructions and appendix C-1 for training announcement. Training sessions were held at Samaritan House Shelter on June 8, 1998, and June 10, 1998. Approximately sixty provider agencies attended the two training sessions.

Questionnaires were completed throughout the day and evening of June 15, 1998 by participating service agencies and homeless persons being served on that day. In addition, agencies currently utilizing the HIS intake system saved information on consumers who were in their program on June 15, 1998, to a disc. Information gathered from the completed questionnaires and the information saved to discs were aggregated at the data entry level.

Moreover, the Denver Department of Social Services provided funding to two day shelters that was used to provide candy bars and pop as an incentive to homeless persons to complete the survey. An unduplicated count was achieved by assigning a unique identifier to each person counted based on age, ethnicity, last permanent address, sex, and marital status.

Aggregation of preliminary estimates on the numbers and characteristics of the homeless population surveyed was reviewed and approved by the MDHI Research Committee and the MDHI Board.

Finally, while the results of this study provide a good base line for estimating the needs of homeless persons in the metropolitan area, it should be noted that only homeless persons receiving and requesting assistance or those found through outreach efforts were counted. It is unlikely, that every homeless person in the metropolitan area was found on that particular day. Families sleeping in their cars and individuals not requesting assistance and who were not found through outreach efforts were not counted. This is a point in time census count and formulas were not utilized to estimate the number of persons not found.