

Iowa Council on Homelessness Facts and Observations

On November 17, 2003, former Governor Tom Vilsack issued Executive Order Number 33 that created the Iowa Council on Homelessness (“Council”). As stated in the Executive Order, “the state of Iowa recognizes that public and private efforts to address and prevent homelessness are in the best interests of all Iowans, and the State of Iowa is committed to ensuring all Iowans have access to safe, decent and affordable housing, health care and education.” The Council is made up of 38 voting members from across the state and includes representatives of state and local governments, nonprofits, advocates and homeless or formerly homeless individuals. In this last year the General Assembly and Governor Culver officially codified the council designating the Iowa Finance Authority as the administrative agency.

The primary mission of the Iowa Council on Homelessness is to:

- Identify causes and effects of homelessness in Iowa and develop recommendations to address homelessness.
- Foster greater awareness among policy makers and the general public, and
- Ensure all Iowans have access to safe, decent and affordable housing, health care and education.

In carrying out this mission, the Council seeks to increase public awareness and education about homelessness through various means including providing;

- Information and tools for everyday Iowans to make a difference in the lives of the homeless, and
- Ongoing information, tools and resources to policy makers on how to positively impact homelessness

FACTS:

The following facts are taken from the Council’s 2007 report to the governor. The data for calendar year 2008 is currently being compiled.

17,908 unique Iowans were homeless last calendar year and served by one of our homeless service providers. An additional **10,010** Iowans were at risk of becoming homeless and were served by these agencies to prevent homelessness. **This is not a homeless census; rather, this is a homeless service count for 2007.**

FAMILIES:

- Service agencies helped 8, 534 homeless lowans in families during 2007
- 1/3 of homeless families are the working poor.
- 33% of adults in homeless families reported a long term disability.
- 57% of homeless people in families are children
- 5% of homeless families lived on the street prior to receiving services
- 67% of adults in families completed high school or received their GED

INDIVIDUALS:

- 13% of homeless individuals are under 18
- 63% of homeless individuals have been homeless in the past
- 21% of adults are employed when beginning services
- 58% report a long term disability
- 12% served in the Armed Forces
- 12% lived on the streets prior to receiving services
- 8,345 unique people stayed in emergency shelter and 4,314 stayed in transitional shelter in 2007

Putting it into Perspective –

A total of 27,571 people were homeless or near homeless in 2007 and were served by a reporting agency. Of that number, 10,206 were under the age of 18! These are real people, not an estimate of actual people in need. These are people in crisis and stress, unimaginable to most of us.

Unfortunately, 84% of these clients that were seen in 2007 were not seen in 2006 by Service providers.

This means that 47,498 unique people were served during the last two years.

Only 1,286 people entered into emergency shelter in 2006 and re-entered Emergency Shelter in 2007.

While this is good news that most people are not staying homeless for extremely long periods of time, it is bad news that there are so many new people that need assistance each year.

Overall decrease since 2006:

We show a decrease from 2006 of 1,325 people. While this would seem to be a positive note, because of regulatory changes related to domestic violence providers we had 27 fewer agencies reporting in 2007 than 2006. The Des Moines Continuum of Care, which did not report Domestic Violence data in 2006 or 2007, showed a 9% increase in homeless clients served. Further study and review of 2008 data will indicate trends with our homeless and near-homeless populations.

Emerging Concerns –

Of course we are now seeing foreclosure and disaster issues for Iowans. We anticipate that both of these issues will have a greater impact on “at-risk” Iowans in the coming years.

Who are we missing?

We know that many people are missing from our data:

- *Families are under-reported for several reasons. We have very few shelters for families, and information is not recorded for people who are turned away for lack of space. Also, domestic violence shelters did not submit information for this report. Lastly, many people, particularly families, avoid shelters, living instead in cars or doubling up with another family.*
- *Veterans often fail to report their status to providers and federally funded, Veteran-specific programs do not participate in this data effort.*
- *Information for children in families is not always recorded by providers, and children are often left in another’s care while a parent is in a shelter.*
- *Individuals - Many faith-based facilities do not receive government dollars and choose to not participate in the statewide data network. In some cases, these programs account for a significant number of beds in a community.*

Why Should We Care?

- **Costs** Homeless people are involved in more “systems” and more assistance is required due to the difficulties that come with being homeless
- **Education** Estimates indicate that three to six months of education are lost every time a child moves. Homeless families often move several times before finding permanent housing.
- **Health** Without stable housing, pre-existing conditions are aggravated, routine health care is ignored and high risks of catastrophic health problems increase
- **The Right Thing to Do!** Iowans have a tradition of stepping up to help those in need. Assisting those with the least improves their situation and improves the quality of life for all of us.

Our Ongoing Hope . . .

Is that this information makes real the extent of need in our communities, recognizes the hard work done by our service agencies and results in policy changes to improve services to those in need; ensuring that homelessness be avoided when possible and to help minimize the impact when it cannot.

For additional information visit the Council’s web page at

http://www.iowafinanceauthority.gov/en/for_communities_housing_org/iowa_council_on_homelessness/index.cfm