



The Community Report On Homelessness
2007

A project of:

The Suncoast Partnership to End Homelessness

- Serving Manatee and Sarasota Counties -

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* * *

Most of all, we want to thank the 1,043 homeless persons that agreed to be interviewed and provide information for this report. We thank and honor you for your effort in helping our community better understand the plight of the homeless that reside in our community. We hope our community will reciprocate with a better understanding, more compassion and a ready willingness to lend a helping hand.

Introduction

This community report on homelessness is an analysis of information gathered during the Homeless Census conducted in January of 2007. The survey was coordinated by the Suncoast Partnership to End Homelessness, the lead agency addressing homelessness in Manatee and Sarasota counties.

Manatee and Sarasota counties have been conducting a Homeless Census for the past 8 years, with the last census conducted in January 2005. The following report attempts to shed light on the nature and causes of homelessness in our community by reporting results of this year's census and comparing the results with the 2005 Homeless Census in an attempt to determine changes in the number of homeless individual and families, their demographics and their needs, both met and unmet. This report provides information to the Manatee and Sarasota communities to help meet the following goals:

- To help local leaders and policy-makers understand the nature and needs of homeless individuals in our community.
- To help service providers better understand the demographics and needs of homeless persons in our community so they may effectively focus their efforts and resources to best meet their needs.
- To inform planning efforts so local leaders in government, not-for-profit and the private sectors can work together to create proper housing for homeless persons.
- To educate the public about the plight of homelessness, to help dispel misunderstandings and to build support for efforts that address the needs of the many homeless people that reside in our community.
- To inform state and federal government representatives about the severity of local homeless needs in our community in an effort to increase funding and inform “best-practice” policies to achieve the goal of ending homelessness in our time.

Data and Methodology

The survey instrument used for the 2007 assessment (see Appendix A) was one of two forms proscribed by the Florida Department of Children and Families, Office on Homelessness. The short version was used for our census and took approximately 5-7 minutes to administer. The survey asked screening questions, demographic questions, and questions about an individual's history of homelessness, other family members that were or had experienced homelessness, about financial resources, and social services that they felt were necessary to help them overcome homelessness.

In December of 2006, four training sessions were held for representatives from 45 different organizations and the 20 unaffiliated volunteers that had agreed to help conduct interviews. To ensure that all volunteers were properly trained, two sessions were held in each county, with one session occurring in the morning and one in the evening. The survey was administered over a 24-hour period, from noon to noon, on January 29th & 30th. The interviews were conducted with homeless persons where they seek services (social service agencies) and through interviews at homeless camps, on the street and in other locales, such as libraries, to reach homeless persons who tend not to seek services. The outreach effort was primarily carried out with the assistance of public safety officers and caseworkers from Manatee Glens.

The purpose of using a "point in time" style survey is to approximately determine how many people in the Manatee and Sarasota community experience homelessness on an average night. The survey questions are read aloud to participants and the volunteers were instructed to write "refused" on a survey if an individual refused to be interviewed so that those who chose not to participate would still be counted. Although the training emphasized the importance of this to volunteers during training, our analysis of data shows that many volunteers did not follow this protocol. As a result, there appears to be a drastic decline in the number of homeless individuals as compared with the 2005 report even though anecdotal information and data collected through the HMIS (Homeless Management Information System) suggests otherwise.

There are several other notable limitations with the methodology of this study. First, there is no way to truly account for the number of homeless people in our community because many homeless individuals can not be located, others refuse to be interviewed and others would not necessarily visit one of the 45 agencies conducting the survey during the proscribed 24-hour period that the survey was administered. There is also no reliable way to locate and count homeless individuals that are temporarily staying with family or doubling up with a friend during the time in which this survey was given. Another limitation of the census was that surveys given in Spanish may have contained questions that were unclear when translated into English. We expect this explains the wide range of the answers given in the section regarding homeless family members.

In order to ensure that participants were not being counted more than once, respondents were asked whether or not they had taken the survey earlier in the day. If they marked "yes" or if their name was found more than once in the database, these duplicates were removed. A total of 26 surveys were removed from the study because they were duplicates.

To observe trends in homelessness over time, the results from this survey were compared with the Homeless Census 2005 results. In 2005, Manatee and Sarasota Counties conducted their own surveys, so those results were combined in order to adequately compare that data to this year's data. However, Appendix B does provide comparative data by county and year to show trends specific to each county over time.

The size of the total usable sample from the 2007 survey for Sarasota/Manatee is 1,043, whereas the usable for the combined 2005 surveys on Sarasota and Manatee counties totals 2,427. As previously mentioned above, there are likely several reasons for this discrepancy, the primary reason being not counting people who refused to be interviewed but were likely homeless. Also, the data from surveys mailed to families of school children in Manatee and Sarasota Counties is not included in this report. Presently that data is being analyzed and prepared for release in a separate report.

Defining Homelessness

For the purposes of the survey, homelessness was defined according to the State of Florida's predefined classification based on the responses to questions 3, 4, and 5a which can be found in Appendix A. Participants had to indicate that they did not have a regular place to stay, or that they had spent the last night in an emergency shelter, transitional housing, permanent housing for the homeless, a psychiatric facility, a substance abuse treatment facility, a hospital, a jail/prison or detention facility, or in a place not meant for human habitation. This report also defines participants who spent the last night at the house of a friend or family member as homeless. If participants refused to answer these questions, or did not remember where they had stayed the night before, they were also counted as homeless. Finally, participants were classified as homeless if they indicated they would be forced to leave the place they were staying within the next week. Using these criteria, 1,043 individuals fit this definition of homelessness. This definition of homelessness was used by the Suncoast Partnership to End Homelessness to provide the most accurate picture of who is experiencing homelessness in our community because it was deemed most informative in helping local providers decide how to best provide services and allocate limited staff and funding resources.

In contrast, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) defines homelessness in a more limited scope:

§ 11302. General definition of homeless individual

(a) In general

For purposes of this chapter, the term "homeless" or "homeless individual or homeless person" [1] includes—

- (1) an individual who lacks a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence; and
- (2) an individual who has a primary nighttime residence that is—
 - (A) a supervised publicly or privately operated shelter designed to provide temporary living accommodations (including welfare hotels, congregate shelters, and transitional housing for the mentally ill);
 - (B) an institution that provides a temporary residence for individuals intended to be institutionalized; or
 - (C) a public or private place not designed for, or ordinarily used as, a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings.

(b) Income eligibility

(1) In general

A homeless individual shall be eligible for assistance under any program provided by this chapter, only if the individual complies with the income eligibility requirements otherwise applicable to such program.

(2) Exception

Notwithstanding paragraph (1), a homeless individual shall be eligible for assistance under title I of the Workforce Investment Act of 1998 [29 U.S.C. 2801 et seq.].

(c) Exclusion

For purposes of this chapter, the term "homeless" or "homeless individual" does not include any individual imprisoned or otherwise detained pursuant to an Act of the Congress or a State law.

Characteristics of Surveyed Homeless People

Gender

Of the homeless population, 734 individuals identified themselves as male, making up seventy-six percent (76%) of the local homeless population, while 236 individuals identified themselves as female, making up twenty-four (24%) of the population. In 2005, there was also a majority of 933 males (62%) making up the homeless population, with 570 females making up the other thirty-eight percent (38%). Thus, the trend of having a higher population of homeless males is not new, although this year, the difference between the two groups does appear to be more inflated.

Ethnicity

The data revealed that of the homeless population living in Sarasota and Manatee County, sixty-four percent (64%) identified themselves as white, sixteen percent (16%) as black, fourteen percent (14%) as Hispanic, three percent (3%) as American Indian or Alaskan Native, and less than one percent (<1%) as Asian, Hawaiian, or Pacific Islander. However, it should be noted that participants were allowed to give multiple answers to this question, to allow them an opportunity to best define their ethnic background. This may have resulted in an over representation of the white homeless population, as many Hispanic participants (31%) also identified themselves as white.

The results from the 2005 report show that the percentage of white and black homeless individuals has gone down slightly, while the proportion of other races stayed about the same. There was no data available for the Hispanic population in 2005, another possible reason that there were a high number of individuals that chose “other” that year.

Race	2007 Sarasota/Manatee Frequency (%)	2005 Sarasota/Manatee Frequency (%)
Hispanic	126 (14%)	N/A
White	660 (64%)	699 (67%)
Black	170 (16%)	192 (19%)
American Indian / Alaskan Native	33 (3%)	30 (3%)
Asian	4 (<1%)	2 (<1%)
Hawaiian / Pacific Islander	3 (<1%)	1 (<1%)
Other	30 (3%)	113 (11%)

Age

Of the persons interviewed, ten percent (10%) were younger than eighteen-years-old, eighty-five percent (85%) were between the ages of eighteen and sixty years-old, and six percent (6%) were older than sixty. However, this data does not include the surveys of families in the Manatee and Sarasota County school districts that were conducted by mail during the same time the homeless census was conducted. Therefore this report very likely under-represents the number of young people facing homelessness.

In 2005 the number of homeless participants under the age of eighteen was much higher in both frequency and percentage than this year. This is at least partially because surveys of families in Manatee and Sarasota County school districts could not be analyzed for inclusion in this report. Without the data from the school surveys, it is difficult to examine the trends in homelessness for children at this time. In both years, adults made up the majority of the homeless population, though in 2005, the proportion was much larger this year. Again, this was probably because there were fewer surveys obtained from homeless children to balance these proportions. Finally, the number of older individuals has stayed relatively constant over the course of two years.

Age	2007 Sarasota/Manatee	2005 Sarasota/Manatee
<18	102 (10%)	919 (39%)
18-60	883 (85%)	1372 (58%)
< 60	58 (6%)	91 (4%)

Disabilities

Forty-seven percent (47%) of the homeless population identified in the census indicated they a disabling condition. Of 1,043 homeless individuals, twenty-eight percent (28%) indicated that they had a physical disability, eighteen percent (18%) a drug or alcohol addiction, fourteen percent (14%) a disability related to mental health, two percent (2%) a HIV/AIDS related disability, and one percent (1%) a developmental disability. Many people indicated that they had more than one of these conditions, and many others indicated they had a disabling condition, but did not specify a condition. This resulted in a higher percentage of people with disabilities (63% of total homeless population) than those that indicated a specific disabling condition on question 22a (47% of total homeless population).

By contrast, in 2005, 508 individuals claimed to have a disabling condition. Of these, forty-seven (47%) indicated that they had a physical disability, thirty percent (30%) a disability related to mental health mental, twenty percent (20%) a drug/alcohol addiction, two percent (2%) a developmental disability, and one percent (1%) a HIV/AIDS related disability.

The comparative results reveal that the proportion of homeless individuals with physical and mental disabilities has decreased over the past two years, while the proportion of those with drug/alcohol, developmental, and HIV/AIDS-related disabilities has remained relatively stable.

Veteran status

A total of 169 individuals or nineteen percent (19%) of the homeless surveyed had served active duty in the military, an increase from fourteen percent (14%) in 2005.

Foster care status

A total of 93 individuals or eleven percent (11%) of the homeless population indicated that they had been a part of the foster care system for a period in their lives

Financial resources

When asked to list their sources of income, the largest percentage of the homeless population—forty-two percent (42%)—indicated they had no financial resources. Twenty-eight percent (28%) indicated that they had some form of earned income, six percent (6%) receive Social Security Insurance (SSI), and four percent (4%) receive Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI). One percent (1%) receive general assistance, unemployment, Social Security Retirement (SSA retirement), or Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF). Less than one percent (<1%) receive a job pension, private disability benefit, or workman’s compensation. Finally, four percent (4%) indicated that they had some source of income other than the ones listed.

Overall, two percent (2%) of the homeless population receives child support, while less than one percent (<1%) receive alimony. However, when we examine the sub-group of the 53 homeless parents, the data shows that seventeen percent (17%) receive child support and four percent (4%) receive alimony.

Currently, one percent (1%) of the total homeless population receives veteran disability benefit, while less than one percent (<1%) receives a veteran pension. However, further analysis shows that of the 169 individuals that had served active duty in the military, five percent (5%) reported receiving a veteran’s disability benefit, and two percent (2%) reported receiving veterans’ pension.

Income	2007
Earned income	242 (28%)
Unemployment	14 (1%)
SSI	67 (6%)
SSDI	45 (4%)
Veteran disability	9 (1%)
Private disability	3 (<1%)
Workman’s Compensation	1 (<1%)
TANF	11 (1%)
General assistance	7 (1%)
SSA retirement	10 (1%)
Veterans pension	4 (<1%)
Job pension	5 (<1%)
Child support	19 (2%)
Alimony	3 (<1%)
Other source	45 (4%)
No financial resources	441 (42%)

	General population 2007	Homeless parents (53 total) 2007
Child support	19 (2%)	9 (17%)
Alimony	3 (<1%)	3 (4%)

	General population 2007	Veterans (169 total) 2007
Veteran's disability	9 (1%)	9 (5%)
Veterans pension	4 (<1%)	4 (2%)

Experience with Homelessness

There were 555 homeless individuals (53% of the homeless population) living in Manatee County at the time that this survey was conducted, while 488 (47%) resided in Sarasota County. Of the homeless men and women in Manatee and Sarasota Counties, three percent (3%) have lived here for one week or less, five percent (5%) between one week and one month, seven percent (7%) between one to three months, twelve percent (12%) between three months to one year, and, notably, seventy-three percent (73%) have lived in the community one year or longer.

This survey also attempted to ascertain how many of these individuals were experiencing chronic homelessness, and how many were only encountering occasional homelessness. When asked how many separate instances over the last three years had they been without a regular place to stay, thirty-five percent (35%) indicated that it had only happened once, twenty-eight percent (28%) two to three times, and the largest amount, thirty-seven percent (37%), indicated that they had experienced homelessness four or more times within the last three years. This pattern is similar to the finding in 2005. That year, the participants were also quite evenly divided among categories. Specifically, thirty-four percent (34%) experienced homelessness one time, another thirty-four percent (34%) experienced it two to three times, and thirty-two percent (32%) experienced it four or more times. Thus, the trend of prior experiences with homelessness has changed very little in the past two years.

The participants were also asked whether they had a regular place to stay. There were 623 individuals that answered no to this question, making up sixty-seven percent (67%) of the homeless population. It is important to note that “regular place to stay” is intended to mean a house or apartment however many participants may have interpreted this question in a different manner. For example, a homeless individual may consider a shelter or a particular spot outside to be a “regular place to stay.” As a result, responses to this question may not be conclusive.

When asked how long it had been since they had a regular place to stay, seven percent (7%) said it had been only one week or less, ten percent (10%) indicated that it had been between one week and one month, sixteen percent (16%) said it had been one to three months, twenty-three percent (23%) said that it had been three months to one year, and nearly half—forty-five (45%)—said that it had been one year or longer since they had a regular place to stay. This information illustrates how the descent into homelessness can have very long-term consequences.

Those surveyed were also asked where they had stayed the previous night. This was one of the main factors considered when determining who was defined as homeless for the purposes of this report. Twenty-two percent (22%) of participants meeting the definition of homeless spent the previous night in either an emergency shelter or used a motel voucher, twenty percent (20%) stayed in a place not meant for human habitation (such as a car or the street), seventeen percent (17%) stayed in transitional housing, sixteen percent (16%) stayed in jail, prison, or a detention center, five percent (5%) spent the previous night in a substance abuse treatment facility, and four percent (4%) spent the night in a place other than what was specified in the survey. One percent (1%) reported

staying in a hospital or a motel/hotel that they paid for themselves. Another one percent (1%) did not remember where they had spent the previous night or refused to answer the question. Less than one percent (<1%) spent the previous night in permanent housing for the homeless, a psychiatric facility, or in a foster care home.

Only seven homeless individuals or one percent (1%) spent the previous night in a rented house or apartment while 3 individuals—or less than one percent (<1%)—stayed in an apartment/house that they owned. Eight percent (8%) of the surveyed homeless population stayed with a friend, while four percent (4%) stayed with a family member.

There were a total of 207 homeless individuals that said they had previously spent the night at either a substance abuse treatment facility, a hospital, jail, prison, or a detention center. In an attempt to further discern the condition of these participants' situations, they were also asked where they had been staying before they arrived at that place. Of these 207 individuals, twenty-six percent (26%) stayed in a place not meant for human habitation while fifteen percent (15%) had been staying with a family member and thirteen percent (13%) had been staying with a friend.

Place stayed previous night	Frequency (%)
Emergency shelter (motel voucher)	212 (22%)
Transitional housing for homeless	168 (17%)
Permanent housing for homeless	3 (<1%)
Psychiatric facility	1 (<1%)
Substance abuse treatment facility	44 (5%)
Hospital	9 (1%)
Jail/prison/detention facility	154 (16%)
Rented room/apartment/house	7 (1%)
Owned apartment/house	3 (<1%)
With family member	34 (4%)
With friend	81 (8%)
Hotel/motel paid for by self	10 (1%)
Foster care home	2 (<1%)
Place not meant for habitation	194 (20%)
Other	41 (4%)
Refused	7 (1%)
Don't know	1 (<1%)

The respondents were also asked if they were going to be forced to leave the place they were staying within the next week. This question was significant because it explored the possibility that even though individuals owned or rented a house or apartment they were, in fact, homeless because they would soon be forced to leave. There were a total of 294 participants that indicated that they would soon be forced to leave the place where they were staying, making up thirty-six percent (36%) of the total respondents. In a follow-up question, those 294 participants were asked if they had a place lined up that they could stay after they were forced to leave or money to use to find another residence. The result

showed that 41 of the 294 participants, slightly more than fourteen percent (14.2%), indicated that they did not have another place to stay or money to help pay for some type of shelter. Of the 10 respondents that owned or rented their own house or apartment, 8 or eighty percent (80%) of the respondents indicated that they would be forced to leave soon.

Causes of Homelessness

A majority of fifty-four percent (54%) cited employment or financial reasons as at least one of the causes for the loss of their home, while twenty percent (20%) cited family problems, seventeen percent (17%) cited medical disability problems, twelve percent (12%) cited housing issues, eleven percent (11%) said it was because they were forced to relocate, two percent (2%) indicated that it had to do with a disaster (natural or otherwise), and one percent (1%) cited recent immigration. It should be noted that participants were allowed to select multiple answers, as there can be multiple factors that may have had an influence on their homelessness.

Reason	2007
Employment/financial	450 (54%)
Family problems	193 (20%)
Medical/disability problems	169 (18%)
Housing issues	122 (13%)
Forced to relocate	107 (11%)
Natural/other disaster	16 (2%)
Recent immigration	10 (1%)

Services Needed

Fifty-five percent (55%) of the homeless population indicated that they needed assistance obtaining food, thirty-nine percent (39%) sought basic material goods, thirty-eight percent (38%) needed transportation services, and eleven percent (11%) needed consumer assistance. Sixty-two percent (62%) indicated that they were in need of housing placement, while twenty-seven percent (27%) sought temporary housing placement. Thirteen percent (13%) indicated a need for criminal justice/legal aid services, while another thirteen percent (13%) needed case management services. Forty-two percent (42%) of the homeless population indicated a need for employment assistance and fifteen percent (15%) needed educational services. Thirty-four percent (34%) of the homeless population sought healthcare services, while eighteen percent (18%) sought services for substance abuse, sixteen percent (16%) needed mental health care, and two percent (2%) required HIV/AIDS services. More importantly, of those 185 individuals that previously indicated that they had a drug/alcohol related disability, fifty-two percent (52%) actually sought substance abuse treatment, while sixty percent (60%) of the 141 individuals with a mental health disability used mental health services, and forty-seven percent (47%) of the 17 individuals with an HIV/AIDS related disability sought HIV/AIDS related services.

Finally, four percent (4%) of the overall homeless population needed childcare/daycare services, but when looking only at information obtained from homeless parents, we find much more relevant data. Specifically, of the 53 individuals that reported having children living with them, thirty percent (30%) of these caretakers were seeking childcare or daycare services.

Services	Services used frequency / %	Service not used frequency / %
Food	577 (55%)	465 (45%)
Materials	406 (39%)	636 (61%)
Transportation	399 (38%)	644 (62%)
Consumer assistance	114 (11%)	929 (89%)
Housing placement	642 (62%)	400 (38%)
Temporary housing	279 (27%)	763 (73%)
Criminal justice / Legal Aid	138 (13%)	905 (87%)
Case management	140 (13%)	903 (87%)
Healthcare	359 (34%)	684 (66%)
Substance abuse treatment	184 (18%)	859 (82%)
Mental health treatment	163 (16%)	880 (84%)
HIV/AIDS services	21 (2%)	1022 (98%)
Employment	433 (42%)	610 (58%)
Daycare	43 (4%)	999 (96%)
Education	156 (15%)	887 (85%)

General homeless population using daycare (frequency/percent)	Homeless parents using daycare (frequency/percent)
43 (4%)	16/53 (30%)

Service	General homeless population's use of service	Those with related disability using service
Substance abuse treatment	184 (18%)	97 / 185 (52%)
Mental health treatment	163 (16%)	85 / 141 (60%)
HIV/AIDS treatment	21 (2%)	8 / 17 (47%)

Homeless Families

There were 110 individuals (12%) that indicated they were married, while the majority of 799 individuals (88%) indicated they were single. Of the 1043 respondents defined as homeless, fifty-three individuals or five percent (5%) reported having children that lived with them and ninety-three individuals or nine percent (9%) indicated that they lived with one or more adults. Of the fifty-three individuals that lived with children, seventy-eight percent (78%) were female and twenty-two percent (22%) were male. Seventeen percent (17%) reported receiving child support, four percent (4%) reported receiving alimony, and thirty percent (30%) reported a need for child care services. There were a total of 167 children that were reported living with those 53 homeless parents, which amounts to an average of three children per homeless parent.

As mentioned previously, there is an under-representation of homeless children because this report does not contain data received through mailed surveys to families in the Manatee and Sarasota County school districts. This is clearly one reason the number of homeless people under the age of eighteen was low this year compared to 2005. Specifically, there were 102 respondents that were under eighteen this year making up ten percent (10%) of the homeless population, yet there were 919 of these respondents in 2005 making up thirty-nine percent (39%) of the homeless population that year. It is likely the number of children/young adults experiencing homelessness has not drastically decreased. Although it has not been confirmed, it is likely the 2005 report did include data from school-provided surveys. However, because of methodological issues (different survey forms/questions), a separate analysis is underway and a report on homelessness among school-age children will be issued in the not too distant future.

It is also important to note that many of the volunteers who administered the survey appeared to have trouble filling out the respondent's information regarding homeless relatives and children. For instance, many individuals that were recorded as owning or renting their own home reported that their children were homeless. Most of these errors occurred on the Spanish language surveys. Thus, it appears that some volunteers recorded how many children the respondent had, regardless of whether or not the participant was homeless. Another issue could have been in the translation into English. As an aside, this confusion is a clear indicator that a language barrier can be an impediment in any number of ways—from obtaining housing, to finding employment and accessing services.

Furthermore, many of the participants appeared to answer some questions regarding family and skip others and this made it very difficult to interpret the data. Thus, the data obtained from family-related questions is likely skewed. This is a problem that can be addressed in the future through more careful wording of survey questions and more accurate translations of the text into other languages.

Fortunately, the work of Project HEART in Manatee County and the YMCA in Sarasota County, both supported by their respective school boards, provides a more accurate assessment of the tragedy of children growing up homeless in our community. By way of example, Project Heart reports that there are currently 1,485 homeless students enrolled in Manatee County schools.

Discussion

According to the 2007 Homeless Census, there were a considerably smaller number of homeless individuals than in 2005. There were 1,043 homeless individuals identified in Sarasota and Manatee County this year, compared to the 2,427 in 2005. As mentioned, this year's numbers were unduly influenced by several key factors. Most importantly, many identified individuals refused to take the survey although they were supposed to be recorded by the volunteers who administered the survey. Many of these individuals would have been considered homeless according to the community's definition of homelessness (as discussed in on Page 6). The analysis also shows that the total number of individuals that refused to take the survey decreased this year. There may be several reasons for this decrease in the refusal count. As mentioned, volunteers did not count those that refused to be interviewed even though they were likely homeless either judging from appearance or because of the type of services they were seeking. There were also several anecdotal accounts that there was a concerted campaign advising homeless individuals not to participate in the homeless census this year.

Another reason that the local homeless population appears to have declined is because a different survey was sent out to families with children enrolled in Manatee or Sarasota schools. For methodological reasons, the school survey information is not included in this report. This likely explains why the percentage of participants under the age of eighteen (10%) was much smaller this year in comparison to 2005 when minors made up thirty-nine percent (39%) of the homeless population. That data will be reported separately and is expected shed to better light on the particular concern that many children are growing up homeless in our community.

On another note, the purpose of a point-in-time survey is to count the population of homeless on an average day—a snapshot of homelessness if you will—yet homeless individuals do not necessarily seek services everyday so many homeless individuals were simply not present to be interviewed and counted. Of course, other homeless individuals and families chose to remain “invisible” for a myriad of reasons—prejudice, stigma, fear and distrust of authority, among them.

Although there were many issues, both known and unknown, that influenced and likely under estimated the homeless count this year, the census results do have a lot to tell us about the homeless individuals that populate our community. It is noteworthy that thirty-seven percent (37%) of respondents reported they have been without a place to stay four or more times in the past three years. Sixty-seven percent (67%) reported they did not have a regular place to stay at present and forty-five percent (45%) indicated that it had been one year or longer since they had a stable place to call home. As we have found in the past, most homeless individuals—seventy-three percent (73%)—have lived in Sarasota or Manatee County for one year or longer which shows that the vast majority of homeless people are relatively long-term community members that face unstable living conditions and live in fear of not knowing where their next night's bed will be found.

A large portion of the homeless population—forty-two percent (42%)—indicated they were making an effort to seek employment and fifty-four percent (54%) attributed their homelessness to the inability to gain employment or to other financial reasons.

It thus appears that a large number of homeless individuals are attempting to better their situation by actively seeking employment, although it is apparent that many of them can not find stable employment that pays a living wage. And many homeless individuals—forty-three percent (43%)—have no financial resources of any kind.

The Community Report on Homelessness illustrates a need for more and continuing support for homeless persons that reside in our community. The homeless individuals that completed our survey expressed the greatest need for the very basic elements of life that most people in our community are blessed with and take for granted: a home, a job, food and health care. Many live with physical, mental health, substance abuse, and HIV/AIDS disabilities and, most disturbing of all, there are too many homeless children—children that should behold a promising future but instead are grappling with a life of humiliation and poverty.

There are several issues that should be addressed in future homeless census efforts. The survey instrument used to produce this report asks questions about family members and others that live with respondents. This proved to be confusing to interviewers and interviewees alike. As a result, many times the entire section was left blank. There was also no specific question that inquires about incidents of domestic abuse being a causative factor of homelessness for woman and children. Although there are clearly many circumstances that require confidentiality, we feel the report is misleading because of the omission of a question related to domestic violence.

A related issue is the local community's definition of homelessness. This year, as in years past, the community definition of homelessness has included individuals that were counted even if they refused to partake in the survey. It is likely that many individuals who refused to participate in the census were, indeed, homeless either because of their perceived hygiene or living conditions or because of the services they were seeking. However, an interviewer can not make a clear judgment unless they are told. Again, because these persons were not counted, we feel this report does not accurately report the true number of homeless persons living in the Manatee and Sarasota County community. For this reason, in the future we recommend that those who are identified but refuse to be interviewed be counted as refused and "individuals likely at risk of homelessness."

In closing, we hope that this report makes local citizens and leaders more aware of the obstacles and challenges facing those living at the lowest rung of the socio-economic ladder in our community. Of the many men, women and children experiencing chronic homelessness and living in unsafe or unstable places, almost half—forty-seven percent (47%)—have some form of disability that presents a particular life challenge. A large proportion—forty-two percent (42%)—indicated that they need employment while twenty-eight percent (28%) indicated that they are working but still experiencing homelessness.

The 2007 Community Report on Homelessness illustrates a grim reality of our times: it is difficult for many to find an affordable home, a job with a livable wage and the services they so desperately need.

A community is only as strong as its most vulnerable citizens. It is our hope that this

report serves as a clarion call to every community citizen to support those individuals and organizations that do help homeless individuals by providing support services, housing, employment, food, medical care and education and training to homeless persons so they may again, to the greatest extent possible, lead productive and dignified lives.

Appendix A

2007 Homeless Census Survey

Appendix B

Data Separated by County and Year

	2007 Sarasota	2005 Sarasota	2007 Manatee	2005 Manatee
Total Homeless	488	1,008	555	1,419

Gender	2007 Sarasota	2005 Sarasota	2007 Manatee	2005 Manatee
Male	325 (73%)	592 (64%)	409 (78%)	341 (59%)
Female	119 (27%)	331 (36%)	117 (22%)	239 (41%)

Race	2007 Sarasota	2005 Sarasota	2007 Manatee	2005 Manatee
Hispanic	38 (9%)	N/A	88 (18%)	167 (25%)
White	308 (64%)	387 (72%)	352 (64%)	312 (47%)
Black	87 (18%)	94 (18%)	83 (15%)	98 (15%)
American Indian / Alaskan Native	17 (4%)	11 (2%)	16 (3%)	19 (3%)
Asian	2 (>1%)	0	2 (>1%)	2 (>1%)
Hawaiian / Pacific Islander	1 (>1%)	0	2 (>1%)	1 (>1%)
Other	9 (2%)	43 (8%)	21 (4%)	70 (10%)

Marital Status	2007 Sarasota	2005 Sarasota	2007 Manatee	2005 Manatee
Single	382 (90%)	299 (90%)	417 (86%)	201 (39%)
Married	42 (10%)	35(10%)	68 (14%)	107 (21%)
Divorced, separated, widowed	N/A	N/A	N/A	213 (41%)

Age	2007 Sarasota	2005 Sarasota	2007 Manatee	2005 Manatee
> 18	54 (11%)	400 (40%)	48 (9%)	519 (38%)
18-60	405 (83%)	567 (57%)	478 (86%)	807 (59%)
< 60	29 (6%)	41 (3%)	29 (5%)	50 (4%)

Do you have a regular place to stay?	2007 Sarasota	2005 Sarasota	2007 Manatee	2005 Manatee
Yes	121 (28%)	N/A	184 (37%)	229 (40%)
No	308 (72%)	N/A	315 (63%)	345 (60%)

How long since you had a regular place to stay?	2007 Sarasota	2005 Sarasota	2007 Manatee	2005 Manatee
1 week or less	26 (6%)	17 (5%)	29 (7%)	46 (10%)
More than 1 week, less than 1 month	44 (11%)	42 (12%)	39 (9%)	47 (10%)
Between 1 and 3 months	75 (18%)	83 (24%)	67 (15%)	88 (19%)
More than 3 months, less than 1 year	85 (21%)	59 (17%)	109 (25%)	131 (28%)
1 year or longer	181 (44%)	142 (42%)	200 (45%)	152 (33%)

Prior episodes of homelessness in the past 3 years	2007 Sarasota	2005 Sarasota	2007 Manatee	2005 Manatee
1 time	151 (37%)	155 (29%)	150 (34%)	192 (39%)
2-3 times	103 (25%)	198 (37%)	138 (31%)	158 (32%)
4 + times	153 (38%)	188 (34%)	160 (36%)	144 (29%)

Disabling condition?	2007 Sarasota	2005 Sarasota	2007 Manatee	2005 Manatee
Yes	212 (52%)	242 (24%)	199 (43%)	172 (12%)
No	199 (48%)	N/A	266 (57%)	N/A

Disability type	2007 Sarasota	2005 Sarasota	2007 Manatee	2005 Manatee
Physical	94 (28%)	126 (53%)	129 (29%)	111 (42%)
Developmental	6 (1%)	1 (>1%)	5 (1%)	9 (3%)
Mental health	61 (13%)	78 (32%)	80 (14%)	75 (28%)
Substance abuse	105 (22%)	35 (14%)	80 (14%)	65 (25%)
HIV/AIDS	14 (3%)	2 (1%)	3 (1%)	4 (2%)

Services Needed	2007 Sarasota Services used by frequency / percent	2005 Sarasota Services used by frequency / percent	2007 Manatee Services used by frequency / percent	2005 Manatee Services used by frequency / percent
Food	242 (50%)	N/A	335 (60%)	293 (51%)
Housing placement	300 (62%)	N/A	342 (62%)	298 (51%)
Temporary housing	132 (27%)	N/A	147 (26%)	106 (18%)
Healthcare	181 (37%)	N/A	178 (32%)	201 (35%)
Substance abuse treatment	100 (20%)	N/A	84 (15%)	60 (10%)
Mental health treatment	72 (15%)	N/A	91 (16%)	69 (12%)
Education	95 (19%)	N/A	61 (11%)	147 (25%)

Veteran	2007 Sarasota	2005 Sarasota	2007 Manatee	2005 Manatee
Yes	71 (17%)	61 (5%)	98 (20%)	82 (15%)
No	358 (83%)	444 (95%)	382 (80%)	452 (85%)