



Who is Homeless?

On January 29, 2009, 1,454 individuals were experiencing homelessness in Indianapolis, according to a comprehensive count conducted that night.

- 42% of individuals were members of families, including 359 children. The number of homeless families increased 78%, from 120 families in 2008 to 213 families in 2009.
- 25% of the individuals counted were employed while they were homeless.
- 14% were in school.
- 240 people were veterans.
- 276 people were women fleeing from domestic violence.
- 50% suffered from a medical or mental illness or disability, or from addiction.
- 25% percent of the individuals counted had been released within the last year from a state institution such as a prison, hospital or other facility following a stay of at least one week.

Other statistics:

- Most panhandlers are not homeless. And, individuals who are homeless and do engage in legal, passive solicitation (holding a sign or cup) represent less than 1% of the homeless population in Indianapolis.
- As many as 28% of the people homeless and living on the streets and 18% of shelter residents in Marion County on any given night may be veterans.
- It is estimated as many as 700 local families every year could become homeless due to domestic violence.
- About 70 young people become too old to continue in the foster care system each year in Marion County without being reunited with their birth families or connected to other permanent families. Currently, an estimated 20% of young people aging out of foster care become homeless and 25% will be incarcerated.

Why do people become homeless?

The primary contributor to homelessness is the lack of affordable housing, but homelessness results from many other factors, including loss of employment, low-paying jobs, addiction, mental illness, or a family or medical crisis. No more than 30% of a household's income can be spent on housing for it to be considered affordable.

- The current minimum wage is \$7.25 per hour. But the 2008 adjusted Self-Sufficiency Standard indicates that a family of three in Indianapolis would have to earn \$15.62 an hour in order to meet their basic costs without public or private assistance. A single parent employed in a minimum wage job in Indianapolis would have to work the equivalent of two full-time jobs – over 86 hours a week—to be able to afford a decent, safe, two-bedroom apartment at a fair market rent for herself and two children.
- Only 5 to 18% of all Marion County families receiving TANF also receive a housing subsidy. Many working people who lack housing subsidies spend significant portions of their incomes on housing and childcare, leaving them in poverty and at risk for becoming homeless. For a single working mother with two children earning an income just above the poverty line (\$15,219), childcare expenses can exhaust up to 75 percent of her salary.

What does homelessness cost?

Local and national research has shown that permanently housing people experiencing homelessness and providing them with support services saves public dollars. Further evidence shows that supportive housing provides public benefits beyond cost savings, including improved neighborhood safety and beautification and increased or stabilized property values in most communities.

Homelessness also has a quality of life cost. Research shows that children who grow up in secure, safe homes are much more likely to succeed in school and be physically and socially healthier than children who grow up homeless. And homeless individuals are at a higher risk of experiencing medical problems due to poor nutrition, inadequate hygiene, exposure to violence and to the elements, increased contact with communicable diseases, and the constant stress of residential instability.

A 2007 study of local “frequent users” of public services indicates that the City of Indianapolis expends \$5,912 - \$15,560 in the public health and criminal justice systems to respond to needs of the average homeless person with mental illness and/or substance abuse issues. This corresponds to an annual estimated expenditure of between \$3 – 7.8 million to Marion County and the City of Indianapolis to serve approximately 500 people. These are only costs associated with public health and criminal justice related expenditures and do not include shelter and other emergency services.

A 2006 review of ACES, a Marion County program that successfully served chronically homeless individuals with co-occurring mental illness and substance abuse disorders, demonstrated a 75% reduction in public healthcare costs, with an estimated savings of over \$1 million for 121 clients served.

What progress has been made in Indianapolis since the Blueprint started?

At the time the *Blueprint* was launched in 2002, it was estimated that within Indianapolis as many as 3,000 people were experiencing homelessness on any given night and approximately 15,000 people experienced homelessness over the course of a year. With each passing year, the total number of people found to be experiencing homelessness in Indianapolis has dropped, based on comprehensive point-in-time counts conducted by CHIP and community partners. The January 2009 homeless count estimates 4,400 to 7,300 people now experience homelessness over the course of a year in Indianapolis.

Other progress includes the following:

- Through adoption of the principles of the *Blueprint to End Homelessness*, there has been a fundamental change in how our community perceives homelessness.
- New services and collaborations have been formed to holistically end and prevent homelessness.
- The Marion County Low Income Housing Trust Fund now receives more than \$1 million annually to support housing options for low income families and individuals.
- The *Blueprint* calls for the creation of 2,100 units of supportive housing during the first five years by applying supportive services to both existing and new units of affordable housing. The *Blueprint* also set a five-year goal for the creation of 1,700 brand new units of affordable housing. While Indianapolis has met the five year goal for creating new units of affordable housing, our community lags well behind on the goal of increasing the affordable units with supportive services.

How can I advocate to help end and prevent homelessness in my community?

- *Raise awareness among your friends, colleagues, classmates, neighbors and family.* Many people associate homelessness with negative stereotypes of skid rows and panhandlers. These stereotypes promote misinformation, apathy, and sometimes hostility, and as a result they get in the way of effective policies that can move people into housing and services. Very few of the nearly 1,500 people experiencing homelessness in our community fall within these negative stereotypes. Help break the stereotypes that stand as barriers to our ability to help all of the people experiencing homelessness in our community by educating others about the faces of homelessness.
- *Promote the Blueprint to End Homelessness and the EndHomelessnessIndy Website.* When you donate your time, treasure and talent to organizations, encourage them to promote and follow the strategies set out in the *Blueprint*. Visit www.EndHomelessnessIndy.org, and encourage your family, friends, and other contacts to do so as well. Contact us to request an EndHomelessnessIndy wristband, and offer it to others as a way to spread the word about the website, the *Blueprint*, and ways in which they can support an end to homelessness in our community
- *Contact you local, state and federal leaders.* Ending homelessness saves public dollars and benefits the community. Contact your City-County Council member, state senator, or state representative to express your support for ending homelessness, developing more units of affordable housing in our community, and investing in social services to help people return to and stay in safe and affordable housing. Ask your local, state and federal officials to lend their support.
- *Write letters to the editor and submit articles to local media outlets supporting an end to homelessness through increased investment in affordable housing and supportive services.*
- *Share your story.* Each of us has an experience in serving or being served, and each of us has a voice to share that story in a way that might touch others. Share your story at www.EndHomelessnessIndy.org.