“Bringing Lethbridge Home”

2013 Homeless Census Report

Prepared for Social Housing in Action by:
The Community and Social Development Group, City of Lethbridge
With assistance from:
Jerry Firth, Practicum Student, Faculty of Social Work
University of Calgary Southern Alberta Region
November 2013
## Table of Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Major Findings</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methodology</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Street Census and Agency Census</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Street Census Results and Comparative Analysis</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to Secure Affordable Housing</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Length of Time Homeless</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Length of Time in Lethbridge</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demographics</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Snapshot Profile of Lethbridge Shelter and Resource Center</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussion</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limitations</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volunteer Evaluations and Recommendations</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>References</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix A: Agency Census Data Collection Form</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix B: Oath of Confidentiality</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix C: Photo Release Form</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix D: Homeless Census Agenda</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix E: Homeless Census Safety Orientation Briefing</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix F: 2012 Homeless Census Questionnaire</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix G: Volunteer Evaluation Form</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix H: Key Area Identification Map</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Acknowledgements

Social Housing in Action Committee and the City of Lethbridge would like to thank and recognize the support of everyone who committed their time and energy to the 10th Annual Homeless Census. Without the support and collaborative effort of these individuals and agencies, this project would not have been possible.

We would like to extend our deepest gratitude to the 145 volunteer street enumerators who brought their time, energy, enthusiasm and expertise to this project. We are once again overwhelmed with the growing community support shown by the ever-increasing number of volunteers.

We would also like to thank the following people and service providers for their dedication:

Canadian Mental Health Association
Diane Randell, Manager, City of Lethbridge
Community & Social Development Group -
Lethbridge Housing Authority
Lethbridge Shelter & Resource Centre
Blackfoot Family Lodge
Ray Waddle, Parks Operations Foreman, City of Lethbridge
Sgt. Tiffany Housworth, Lethbridge Regional Police Service
Social Housing in Action, Research & Evaluation Committee
Community Outreach Team
The Mobile Urban Street Team (M.U.S.T.)
TRAC Youth Outreach Team
Treaty 7 Urban Indian Housing Authority
University of Lethbridge, Faculty of Health Science
Wood’s Homes, Emergency Youth Shelter
YWCA Outreach & Harbour House
About Social Housing in Action (SHIA)

Social Housing in Action (SHIA) is a community-based organization that has a mandate to end and prevent homelessness in Lethbridge through the implementation of the 5 Year Community Plan, Bringing Lethbridge Home.

SHIA is one of the seven community-based organizations in Alberta that work with the Provincial Human Services to implement strategies set out in the Alberta government’s ten year plan to end homelessness.

SHIA embraces the principle of ‘Housing First’—that every person has the right to a safe, secure, and permanent home. This principle is at the core of both municipalities’ five year and provincial ten year plans to end homelessness. The ‘Housing First’ approach was officially launched in Lethbridge in 2009.

Bringing Lethbridge Home strengthens the steps required to end homelessness in Lethbridge. SHIA has determined that the future direction requires an increase in permanent housing options and a strengthening of the Housing First supports. Such a strategy will only be possible with support from all stakeholders including all levels of government and the community. Many of these supports are already in place and access to affordable housing continues to be a key priority within the City of Lethbridge’s Social Policy (2008) and the Housing and Homelessness Policy (2013). Both are aligned with this plan to end homelessness.
Major Findings

The 2013 Homeless Census was conducted on October 3, 2013 and is the 10th Annual Homeless Census. The purpose of the Census is to provide comparative data to the previous Homeless Censuses, to understand possible service gaps, and provide current information for planning and monitoring the outcomes of the Housing First and supportive homeless initiatives.

Quick Facts

Below is a list of facts that were exposed the evening of the 2013 Homeless Census:

- 89% decrease in the number of absolute (street) homeless since 2008 and 45 adults stated they were new to homelessness in Lethbridge within the past year
- 8 people enumerated as absolute (street) homeless, 1 of which is confirmed to be connected with Housing First Programs and is currently seeking housing
- 106 individuals experiencing homelessness in emergency shelters
- 15 children and 7 youth under the age of 18 were enumerated within sheltering agencies
- 13% decrease in children experiencing homelessness within the past year
- 4% increase in emergency shelter occupancy over the past year
- 53% of the absolute (street) and sheltered homeless individuals were adult males
- 57% of individuals experience homelessness are between the ages of 31 and 59 and 21% are seniors
- 38 adults stated that they were living in homelessness for 1 or more years
- 936 households are currently on waiting lists for housing and subsidy services
- 145 volunteers participated in the Homeless Census
Count results

- On the evening of October 3, 2013, 8 individuals were counted as absolute (street) homeless in the Street Census. Agencies that participated in the Census reported serving a combined 102 individuals who experienced homelessness that night, along with 4 individuals who stated that they would be staying with friends or family. This resulted in a combined total of 114 individuals whom reported living ‘homeless,’ identified by the Street and Agency Census. Among those counted, 15 were children and 7 youth under the age of 18 were sheltered.

- Of the total 114 homeless individuals who were homeless and enumerated, 8 (7%) were ‘absolute’ homeless and 106 (93%) were ‘sheltered’ homeless. The number of absolute homeless in the 2013 Homeless Census (reporting 8 individuals) showed the first increase since 2008, with an 60% increase from 2012 (reporting 5 individuals), but still an 89% overall decrease since 2008. Further, there was an 84% decrease from 2009, 76% decrease from 2010 and a decrease of 10% from 2011 which reported 10 living in absolute homelessness.

Note: 3 of these individuals were of the 5 counted last year and 2 were new to homelessness this past year (1 recently homeless and the other new to Lethbridge). Of the remaining 4 individuals there is no data available to demonstrate where they are from and how long they have been homeless as they chose not to respond to the questions. Without this information it is difficult to determine an accurate explanation for the increase. However, later in this report there is an explanation of possible reasons for the increase.

- Corresponding with the absolute homeless, we also witnessed an increase in sheltered individuals (reporting 106 individuals) from the 2012 sheltered homeless (reporting 94 individuals), resulting in a 13% increase.

- The Census included a question pertaining to an individual’s ability to secure housing. 50% of the respondents stated “other,” which includes addictions, mental illness, and struggle for income support. This reflects a 32% increase from the 2012 census. 18% of respondents reported it was the “inability to pay rent,” and 10% claimed that “health related issues” were barriers to securing housing.
A question added this year was “how long have you been in Lethbridge.” 19% (12 of 64 respondents) were new to Lethbridge, which we hypothesis is due to migration, transiency, and displacement due to the recent floods.

46% (33 of 71 respondents) recently experienced homelessness within the past year. This is significant which can partially explain the slight increase. Antecedent to the 2013 Homeless Census, Eviction Prevention through the Diversion program of the Lethbridge Shelter was established to address individual’s newly experiencing homelessness.

**Homeless Children/Youth**

- For the purpose of this report, children are individuals aged 12 and under while youth are individuals between the ages of 13 and 18. Importantly, Harbor House (YWCA residence) and Blackfoot Family Lodge classify individuals under the age of 18 as children.

- 15 children were enumerated in the 2013 census, a 13% decrease in the number of children homeless from 2012 (17 children counted).

- Of the total counted number of individuals experiencing homelessness on October 3rd 2013, 7 youth were enumerated. Of these youth, 5 were sheltered at Wood’s Homes Emergency Youth Shelter and 2 additional youth claimed to be staying at the Emergency Shelter, one with a parent. This is a significant increase from 2012 (1 youth counted). All of the youth reported being homeless less than 6 months, one new to Lethbridge within the past year.

**Note:** All of the individuals sheltered at Wood’s have entered shelter due to family conflict (personal communication, November 6, 2013). There is an effort to return all the youth back to their homes with family support, but if this is not possible or the youth choose not to return, other options are available. If the choice is for the youth to enter into their own housing, multiple barriers are identified and compile.

**Demographic Characteristics**

- Of the 114 individuals who were enumerated as homeless, 53 (47%) were identified as male and 46 (40%) female individuals. The remaining 13% were not gender identified. Historically, Homeless Censuses show the number of males who are homeless is higher
than the number of females who are homeless. However, there is an increasing trend toward a balanced gender representation in homelessness.

- The predominant age span of individuals in Lethbridge experiencing homelessness is between the ages of 31 to 59. Of the 73 respondents who revealed their age, 7 (10%) were 18 and under, 10 (14%) were between the ages of 19 to 30, 41 (56%) were between the ages 31 to 59, and 15 (20%) 60+ years of age.

- Of the 114 individuals enumerated, 70 (62%) were of visible minority and 31 (27%) were Caucasian, while 13 (11%) were not identified.

- More than 14 geographic locations including the downtown and the coulees were targeted as areas in which people who are homeless frequent. New areas in south Lethbridge were targeted for enumerators in 2013.

- Supporting evidence for the availability of affordable housing was gained by examining the ratio of people on waiting lists compared to the number of units available for the subsidized housing agencies (Lethbridge Housing Authority (LHA) and Treaty 7 Urban Indian Housing Authority). The LHA currently has 510 households on the waiting list, and provides subsidies and rent supplements to 769 households. LHA provides subsidies to parents with dependent children, seniors, and individuals in need. (Personal communication, November 28, 2012). Treaty 7 Urban Indian Housing Authority has a wait list of 76 applicants and has 105 units within Lethbridge that are housing individuals and families (Personal communication, November 19, 2013). Aboriginal Housing Society has identified that they have approximately 350 applications on file (Personal communication, November 19, 2013).

Homeless Census (2004-2008) research used in the analysis of the data collected, hypothesized that 80% of the population experiencing homelessness are not visible, and therefore not accessible to the Census enumerators (Raising the Roofs, 2004). Additional research indicates up to half as many of the population who are homeless is hidden and cannot be specifically counted (Crisis, 2008). While many bodies of literature indicate the extent of the hidden homeless, a theme remains consistent: the actual number of people experiencing homelessness is significantly higher than that enumerated in a Census of this type, and this population is very difficult to enumerate.
Introduction

The complexity of homelessness requires a comprehensive approach. This systematic and collaborative approach focuses not only on charitable volunteerism, but also on support and contributions from every facet of society, all levels of government, citizens, as well as the public and private sectors. In this effort, SHIA can continue to use a comprehensive approach to eliminating, not managing, homelessness in our community, as outlined in “Bringing Lethbridge Home” (2009-2014).

The 2013 Homeless Census is a tool used to assist Social Housing in Action (SHIA) into further implementing Bringing Lethbridge Home, a Strategic Plan to end homelessness in Lethbridge. It outlines the strategy that SHIA and the City of Lethbridge are undertaking to end homelessness. SHIA is charged with the duty of implementing this plan, and in response has developed and implemented a Housing First approach.

Housing First is the approach to ending homelessness adopted by Lethbridge. It centers on providing individuals who are homeless with housing quickly and then providing services as needed. What differentiates a Housing First approach from traditional emergency shelter or transitional housing approaches is that it is “housing-based,” with an immediate and primary focus on helping individuals and families quickly access and sustain permanent housing. This approach has the benefit of being consistent with what most people experiencing homelessness want and seek help to achieve. Housing First programs share critical elements:

- A focus on helping individuals and families access and sustain permanent housing as quickly as possible. The housing is not time-limited;
- A variety of services including objective based intensive case management (ICM) are delivered primarily following a housing placement to promote housing stability and individual well-being;
- Such services are time-limited or long-term depending upon individual need; and
- Housing is not contingent on compliance with services. Instead, participants must comply with a standard lease agreement and are provided with the services and supports that are necessary to help them do so successfully.
Purpose

The purpose is to provide a ‘snapshot’ in time to determine the extent of homelessness in Lethbridge. The Census is undertaken to not only document the existence of this issue, but also to create community awareness and provide necessary data to plan and develop policy for future community responses to the homeless situation in Lethbridge. NOTE: The Homeless Census has limitations as it provides only a “snapshot in time” of the homeless situation in Lethbridge and informs the impact and effectiveness of the services and the Housing First approach.

The 10th annual Homeless Census builds on the processes and recommendations acquired from previous Homeless Censuses. It follows the general format of the Lethbridge Homeless Count (Fenton, 2004), (Gail, 2005), the Lethbridge Homeless Census 2006/2007 (Buchanan, 2006) and the ‘Biennial Count of Homeless Persons in Calgary’ (Stroick, 2004). Although similar to previous counts, revisions have been made to gather more comprehensive information including the new locations of where people are ‘sleeping rough’ and the employment and/or education of census participants.

Using the information gained from previous Censuses, the SHIA Research and Evaluation Committee identified a need to further determine the extent of homelessness in Lethbridge. The foundation of our research is built from the results of the 2005-2012 Censuses and provides data that can be comparatively analyzed in relation to the data from the recent 2013 Census.

The focus of the Census is to acquire quantitative data from individuals interviewed on the street as well as those accessing agency shelter and transition housing supports. Qualitative observations on demographic characteristics, such as gender, age, visible minority and familial presence, of the people interviewed were also incorporated into the study. The people interviewed were also asked to comment on the reasons they believe have held them back from obtaining secure, affordable and sustainable housing, as well as their feelings on the accessibility of subsidized housing in Lethbridge.

The Lethbridge Housing Authority and Treaty 7 Urban Indian Housing Authority were contacted to discuss the number of subsidized housing units in Lethbridge, as well as the number of individuals currently on wait lists for these units. Local agencies and facilities known to serve the population who are homeless were also asked to participate in the Census.
Definitions
The definitions used in the 2013 Homeless Census are:

**Homeless**
An individual who is:
- living on the street; staying in places not meant for human habitation;
- moving continuously among temporary housing arrangements provided by strangers, friends, or family;
- staying overnight in temporary shelters; or
- unable to stay at their permanent address on the night of the Census.

**Absolute Homeless**
Individuals and families with no housing alternatives. They may be sleeping “rough” on the street, in a stairwell or campsite.

**Sheltered Homeless**
Individuals and families counted at an emergency accommodation and who expect to be in the street at the end of their stay.

**Ability to find secure affordable housing**
An individual who is unable to find affordable housing that is within their means, and remains sustainable and secure.

**Hidden Homeless**
A formula used in the Raising the Roof (2004) campaign indicates that an estimated 80% of the homeless population are not visible and are considered ‘hidden’. These are the people who are: couch surfing, staying in multiple family homes, staying with friends/family, or cannot be otherwise be enumerated the night of the census

**Emergency Shelters**
Provide temporary accommodation for individuals who are homeless and families who would otherwise sleep in the streets. The shelters generally include supports such as food, clothing and support services. Transition housing agencies, are included in this definition as people accessing this type of housing would be fundamentally homeless, if not for these services.

These definitions have been used with the intent in creating a more inclusive term for “Homelessness”. Methodological constraints require specification around the types of agencies that provide services to this population. The definition of homeless has also been created in an attempt to incorporate the 2004 Homeless Count (Fenton, 2004), the First Report Card on Homelessness in Ottawa (Evaluation Working Group, 2005), the Biennial Count of Homeless Persons in Calgary (Stroick, 2004), and those definitions above.
Methodology

The main purpose of the Census is to determine how many individuals in Lethbridge are currently living without a home, in shelters, on the streets, in the coulees, parks, vehicles etc. In addition to actual numerical data, this study attempts to determine reasons that may undermine an individual’s ability to obtain secure affordable housing.

The Homeless Census was conducted on October 3rd, 2013 between the hours of 7 p.m. and 9 p.m. On the evening of the Census the temperature was cool. This date was chosen in order to maintain consistency and to provide an accurate comparison with the previous year’s censuses conducted on: October 6, 2005, October 12, 2006, October 11, 2007, and October 9, 2008, October 8, 2009, October 5, 2010, October 6, 2011, and October 3, 2012. Further, a morning census was conducted by Housing First agencies the day of the census within coulee areas.

A dual focus included a ‘Street Census‘ and ‘Agency Census’. Engaging these two areas concurrently optimizes the use of available resources while decreasing the likelihood of double counting.

To determine how many individuals in Lethbridge are currently living without a home in shelters, on the streets, in the coulees, parks, vehicles etc., the following 3 areas in the methodology are notable:

1. To minimize potential risk and to ensure volunteer safety, enumerators did not investigate the coulees the evening of the census. This was due to the low visibility and potential risk of injuries due to falls and rugged terrain etc. Instead the coulees were counted the morning of October 3rd, 2013. However, we found that with an increase in identified coulee areas to be enumerated there is difficulty in covering all these areas during the morning count. Some of the lesser of these areas were covered in the evening census.

2. A revised Data Collection Sheet (Appendix A) was used by enumerators in 2013. The intention of the revision was to establish a broader data collection in an effort to create a more comprehensive assessment. The two previous data collection sheets, agency and street, were merged into one sheet used by both agencies and the street census enumerators. The revised sheet includes: sleeping place, reason unable to find housing, time homeless, where from prior to Lethbridge, what brought them to Lethbridge, employment, attending school, level of education, and age. Demographic information
included an observation component regarding visible minorities, male or female and number of children, as in the previous year’s count.

3. Further to the revision, two new sections were added, “Time living in Lethbridge” and “Do you want support finding housing.” The prior coincides with “what brought you to Lethbridge” with the intention to understand migration to Lethbridge and reasons for it. From this data we can also determine one of the reasons for increase in the homeless population. The later was to get an understanding as to the importance of supporting individuals experiencing homelessness through the Housing first approach. This section also had a qualitative component to explain the individuals answer of they answered ‘no.’

Note: Feedback from the volunteer enumerators provided us with possibilities to enhance the data sheet format. As illustrated in Annex A, the Data Collection Sheet is small and difficult to read when presented on letter sized paper. The data sheet is intended to print on legal size paper, but even then it can be small and difficult to read, especially in darker lighting. With volunteer feedback in mind, the Data Collection Sheet will be revised for the 2014 Homeless Census.
Street Census and Agency Census

Areas most frequented by individuals who are living homeless were the primary targets for the enumeration. Although these areas were established from previous Censuses, the services of the Lethbridge Regional Police Service, the Mobile Urban Street Team (MUST), the Lethbridge Emergency Shelter and the City of Lethbridge Parks Department were accessed to confirm existing areas and determine any new key areas. These individual’s expertise and familiarity with the homeless population assisted in renewing and adding to the areas of focus. These grid areas were identified and assigned to teams (Appendix H).

All volunteer enumerators and the Team Leads participated in a mandatory orientation prior to conducting the census (Appendix D). The orientation provided instructions on conducting the census and educated volunteers on risks and the safety precautions while conducting the census (Appendix E). As part of the planning, detailed Hazard Assessment was presented to, and approved by, the City of Lethbridge Risk Management Team.

Teams were designed to include four members, with an effort to include the presence of at least one male on each team. The reason for male presence has been found to both deter the likelihood of harassment and provide a mentality of safety. Each team was assigned based on volunteer turnout and led by an experienced and/or competent Team Leader. The teams were instructed to cover their assigned areas within a two-hour period. Teams were assigned one clipboard and instructed to follow a set protocol when interviewing the individuals they encountered, which included a few brief questions and observations (Appendix G). Teams were also instructed to record any information or indication of sleeping rough by marking the area on a provided map.

The Team Leaders were provided with a map of their focus area, screening questions, Data Collection Sheets, emergency contact numbers, and Getting Connected Booklets with contact information for the Lethbridge Shelter & Resource Centre, YWCA Harbour House, the Mobile Urban Street Team (MUST), the Youth Emergency Shelter (Woods Homes), TRAC Youth Outreach and Community Outreach Services. Granola bars, water, socks, gloves and a toque were provided as a thank you to the respondents.

For safety, the teams were instructed to stay together at all times and were provided with flashlights, flashing beacons with whistles, and emergency contact numbers. Each team was required to report in every 30 minutes to a Census Coordinator by use of the team cell phone. Every volunteer was required to provide personal contact information and to sign an Oath of Confidentiality (Appendix B) and Photo Release Form (Appendix C). The volunteer’s contact
information was recorded to provide Workers Compensation Coverage. Volunteers were required to sign in, indicating the time they arrived, and sign out, indicating the time they returned from conducting the census. Volunteers were also given the opportunity to provide feedback on their experience by completing a Volunteer Evaluation Form (Appendix G).

Volunteers conducting the census of the coulee the morning of October 3, 2013, were also given the same instruction above, including the safety and were required to follow the same guidelines.

**Participating Agencies:** The participating agencies were Lethbridge Emergency Shelter, the Wood’s Homes Emergency Youth Shelter, Blackfoot Family Lodge Society, and YWCA Harbour House. The Census Coordinator provided agencies with written instructions for conducting the Census within their organization on the night of October 3, 2013, including definitions and directives on completing the Data Collection Sheet (Appendix A).
Street Census Results and Comparative Analysis

The data collected from the 2013 Homeless Census indicates a 13% increase in the total homeless population over the past year. The sheltered homeless population increased by 4% in the last year, while those living in absolute homeless increased by 44%. A total of 114 people were identified as experiencing homelessness in 2013 census, a 13% increase from 2012 (99).

Since the Homeless Census was conducted in 2008, there has been an 89% decrease in absolute (street) homeless in Lethbridge to 2013. As the graph below indicates, the rate of homelessness gathered by the Homeless Census has been progressively decreasing year to year since 2008, with a slight increase this year, 2013.
Evidence of Sleeping Rough

Evidence of people “sleeping rough” increased from 5 sightings in 2012, to 11 sites in 2013. All 11 of the sites were identified by volunteers from the street census and the coulees. These are images captured by volunteers from past censuses.
Ability to Secure Affordable Housing

Respondents (Street or Agency) had the opportunity to identify the barriers they were experiencing in obtaining affordable housing. The qualitative response was categorized and the graph below illustrates the range of responses. Of 68 responses, there was a clear divide between the “other” response, at 50%, and the other categories. Of the other categories 17% declared “ability to pay rent” as the main barrier in obtaining permanent affordable housing. An additional 12% of respondents claimed that it was “health related issues” as a barrier to securing affordable housing, followed by “employment” at 7% and “ability to acquire damage/utility deposit” at 6%.

![Ability to Secure Affordable Housing](image_url)
An additional category was added to the questionnaire in 2012, which included the length of time homeless. Through the analysis of the data collected, 54% of the 71 respondents identified that they had been homeless for one year or more. This data suggests that chronic homelessness is still an issue in Lethbridge that needs to be addressed. Further, the number of individuals’ recently experiencing homelessness within this past year is just short of half of the respondents (46% of 71 respondents). With this data, and when paralleled with the reasons reported in being unable to obtain affordable housing, we can start to depict the causes of the increase in homelessness in the 2013 Homeless Census.
An additional category was added to the questionnaire in 2013. This included the length of time residing in Lethbridge. As indicated earlier, this question coincides with “what brought you to Lethbridge?” The purpose is to understand migration to Lethbridge and the reasons. From this data, reasons for the increase in the homeless population can be determined. Through the analysis of the data collected, 82% (n=64) identified they had been homeless for one year or more. This figure suggests that chronic homelessness continues to be an issue. There is also an 18% increase in the homeless population due to migration within the past year. This figure joined with the 46% (n=71) of individuals experiencing homelessness within the past year, partially explains the reason for an increase in homelessness in our community.

**Length of Time in Lethbridge**

82% identified they had been homeless for one year or more. There is also an 18% increase in the homeless population due to migration within the past year. This figure joined with the 46% of individuals experiencing homelessness within the past year, partially explains the reason for an increase in homelessness in our community.
Education

Education was another additional category that was added to the 2012 census. There is a presumption or perception that people who are homeless have not acquired necessary skills that enable these individuals to obtain employment. This category has been designed to challenge these perceptions and identify the education and skills that are most common within the population that experiences homelessness. This data can be used toward creating education or skills training for this population that would support individuals in obtaining the necessary skills to obtain employment and maintain permanent housing. 35% of the respondents declared that they have some college or university and 29% of the respondents are identified as high school graduates.

![Education Results Pie Chart]

- Grade 8 or less: 35%
- Some High School: 12%
- High School Graduate: 24%
- Some College/University: 29%

n = 28
Demographics

Enumerators, through observation, identified the gender of the respondents. The following graph compares the gender distributions from 2006-2013 Homeless Censuses. In 2013, of the 92 observable adults who are homeless, 49 (53%) were male and 29 (32%) were female and the remaining 15% were not identified. Since 2006, the Homeless Census has shown that the number of males living in homelessness is higher than the number of females living in homelessness. However, there is an increasing trend toward a balanced gender representation in homelessness.

The graph below provides an eight year comparison of respondent’s ethnicity based on volunteer observations and inquiry.

---

“Brining Lethbridge Home” | 2013 Homeless Census Report
The age distribution displays the age category that best describes respondents by means of volunteer observation or respondent answer. The purpose of age distribution is to obtain a ‘picture’ of the ages of the Lethbridge homeless population. The graph clearly shows a majority of the respondents (56%) are between the ages of 31-59. Note that in the category “18 and under” we only included youth, ages 14-18, as they are likely to be in a shelter agency without a parent, whereas younger children under 14 years are likely to be with a parent.
This year, the enumerators were provided with the revised comprehensive Data Sheet (Appendix A) which allowed for more information to be provided for the individuals at the Shelter at the time of the census. The Shelter reported that 76 individuals that stayed at the shelter on the night of October 3, 2013. The enumerators were able to interview 45 individuals during the time the census was conducted. Also, 14 individuals enumerated by the street volunteers informed the volunteers that they would be staying at the Shelter for the night. Based on this information, it can be assumed the remaining individuals who stayed at the Shelter that evening were enumerated by the Shelter staff if they had stayed at the Shelter longer than the time the census allowed.

Respondents were asked to identify the reasons they were experiencing housing permanency barriers. Of 56 respondents, the most common response was “other,” at 53%, which can be identified as relating to addictions, mental health, lack of housing support and support services. The primary barriers to secure affordable housing, with specific designation, were “ability to pay rent” at 16% and “health related issues” at 13%, to follow with “ability to acquire damage/utility deposit” at 7% and “rental availability/accommodation” at 5%.
The length of time the individuals experienced homelessness was an additional question added to the questionnaire in 2012. From the sample of individuals at the Shelter who responded, 55% of the respondents identified that they had been homeless for a year or more.

As in previous years, enumerators asked participants about their employment status. At the Shelter, 38% identified their participation in part-time employment, with full-time and casual/skills training both at 31%.
Since 2012 the census has included their highest level of education achieved. This allowed for a breakdown of the level of education that had been completed by individuals that were homeless. 35% identified as having some college/university and 29% identified as being a high school graduate.

The majority of the ages identified at the Shelter were documented in the category of 31-59, at 67% of the respondents and 15% identified as ages 60 and older.
One individual at the Shelter reported being a part-time student and appears to be working towards high school diploma completion.

Of the respondents that were enumerated at the Shelter, 73% of the respondents identified as male and 17% of the respondents identified as female. As in previous censuses, the percentage of males that are living in homelessness tends to be greater than females living in homelessness.

Volunteers were also instructed to document by observation only, the ethnicity of the respondent. At the Shelter, 51% of the respondents were identified as of visible minority and 49% were identified as of non-visible minority.

Compared to the 2012 Homeless Census, there was a 4% increase in the occupancy of the Lethbridge Shelter.
Discussion

Since 2008 Lethbridge has experienced a decreasing absolute homeless population. The occupancy at the Emergency Shelter has also seen a decline over the past years. Due to the inherent nature of the Census, we are unable to identify every person living in homelessness, nor can the frequency of homelessness be determined. However, given the continuance of the decreasing trend of sheltered homeless and homeless population living on the streets, there is a slight increase in 2013.

It is difficult to determine the exact cause of this minor increase but from the data we can determine that migration and transiency to Lethbridge, displacement of flood victims, and people recently experiencing homelessness within the past year are significant factors. In regards to migration and transiency, primary reasons indicated for coming to Lethbridge are employment, family/friends, and the reputation of community and Housing First support services including addiction and mental health.

Based on reports from community agencies across the province, people experiencing homelessness mention that a fundamental reason for coming to Lethbridge is for the attractive supports and services offered, which is also indicative of the data. This is also true for people displaced from their area of residence from the recent flooding in Southern Alberta communities and the Siksika Reserve.

Another potential reason for the cause of the reported increase of homelessness in Lethbridge is the introduction of HomeBASE. This service became fully operational in January 2013 as the centralized intake, triage, and referral program for Housing First teams. It is hypothesized that due to its immediate positive impact in the community as a gatekeeper to entry into Housing First, more people experiencing homelessness are willingly to identify themselves as such, so as to receive needed support services and access to housing.

Responses also indicate a majority of the population living in homelessness has either health related issues, “other” factors not identified on the questionnaire, but related to mental health, addiction, or struggle for supports, and the inability to pay rent, as barriers to obtaining permanent, safe and affordable housing. Waiting lists for three housing agencies providing subsidized housing and rent supplements in Lethbridge (Lethbridge Housing Authority, Treaty 7 Urban Indian Housing Authority and Aboriginal Housing Society), indicate the severity of the issue. 936 households are currently on waiting lists for subsidy services, which is an indication that affordable housing is still a critical need in Lethbridge.
The question regarding length of time homeless revealed that 54% of the respondents reported that they had been homeless for a year or more. Chronic homelessness is still an issue in Lethbridge but has decreased through Housing First initiatives. These individuals remain a priority for housing permanency.

The 2013 Homeless Census revealed that a total of 22 children and youth (under 18) were homeless but sheltered at Blackfoot Family Lodge and Harbour House (YWCA), Woods Emergency Youth Shelter including 2 youth who claimed to be staying at the Emergency Shelter, one with a parent. The number of children living homeless has decreased by 13% from 2012, but there is an increase of 88% in youth (ages 13-18) living in homelessness.

Preceding the 2013 Homeless Census, various programs were implemented to address the issue of youth homelessness in Lethbridge. Currently there are three youth specific teams: HESTIA, youth (18-24) in transition program; and Community Outreach for youth (18-24) with complex needs; and Wood’s Homes Youth Shelter, for youth under 18 years.

**Summary**

Despite housing and supporting over 225 households through Housing First this past year (2012-13), there is a slight increase in the point in time count in Lethbridge. This is due to an overall increase in transiency in Alberta, in-migration and relocation to Lethbridge due to flood displacement and the lack of attainable housing options in affected communities and in Lethbridge.

However, the number of people who are chronically homeless has decreased with the Housing First efforts and the stable community supports. The visible success of community support services, Housing First Teams and the HomeBASE has also been a significant factor and has influenced transiency and migration to Lethbridge. The number of absolute homeless has increased by 3 individuals and all outreach efforts are deployed to engage these individuals to consider permanent housing options. The results of this Point in Time Count will be forwarded and recommendations will be considered within the agencies and programs and in the development of the next community service delivery plan and 5 year plan to end homelessness.
Limitations

The 2013 Lethbridge Homeless Census is a “point in time” count and, as such, is a snapshot of homelessness in Lethbridge. However, it provides valuable data concerning the marginalized homeless population. It provides a “temperature gauge” for the “climate” of homelessness in our community. Due to variables and limitations of the data collected, this enumerations validity has limitations in its applicability to the population of people experiencing homelessness in our community.

The actual collection of Census data on October 3, 2013 was subject to a set of variables that could have affected the outcome. These could include, but are not limited to:

- An irregularity in dates that “cheque distribution/income for the population who are homeless in Lethbridge, resulting in “invisible homelessness” as they may stay in a hotel the night of the census;
- Individuals may have been intimidated by the Street enumerators;
- Perceived or actual threat to volunteer enumerators preventing them from approaching potential respondents;
- Inability to enumerate on the street and within the agencies at the same time;
- Possibility of visual and/or spatial restriction causing people to be missed in a specific location; and
- Inability to enumerate the hidden homeless.

This list is not comprehensive, nor does it mean the listed limitations will have necessarily occurred. Nevertheless, they must be noted to understand the variables and limitations of the collected data.

However, the Census provides a generalized description of the visible population, and highlights the existence of homelessness in our community.
Volunteer Evaluations and Recommendations

Immediately following the 2013 Homeless Census, volunteer street enumerators were asked to complete an evaluation on their perceptions of the Census process and its organization (Appendix H). Evaluations were based on a scale of 1-5, with 1 indicating “Strongly Disagree” and 5 indicating “Strongly Agree”. The graph below indicates that the average score of the 125 volunteer evaluations we received was between 4 and 5.

The three most frequent recommendations/comments made by the volunteers were:

- This inspired me to become more active in the community;
- Addictions should be added as a barrier to obtaining housing;
- Too much time allotted to complete the assigned grid; and
- Well organized.

The feedback from the volunteers was invaluable as it both supported and enhanced our evaluation of the Homeless Census. The majority of the suggestions offered by volunteers were in regards to the logistics of the census, with a primary focus on supplies for high density areas, as well as feedback regarding clarity of the census forms. Another area we will focus on for 2014 will be area navigation, especially in coulee and other non-residential/business areas of the city.
References


## Appendix A: Census Data Collection Sheet

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Home</th>
<th>Shelter</th>
<th>Other Agency</th>
<th>Relative/Family</th>
<th>Friend/Acquaintance</th>
<th>Hospital</th>
<th>Vehicle</th>
<th>Park and/or Creekside</th>
<th>Street and/or Doorway</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Employment

- [ ] Fully employed
- [ ] Partially employed
- [ ] Unemployed
- [ ] Working Part-time
- [ ] Working Full-time
- [ ] Self-Employed
- [ ] Unavailable
- [ ] Other

### Health Related Issues

- [ ] Drug Addictions
- [ ] Alcohol Addictions
- [ ] Mental Health
- [ ] No

### Financial Tryouts

- [ ] Unable to acquire damages/ability deposit
- [ ] Unable to pay rent
- [ ] Unable to find housing
- [ ] Unavailable

### Current City

- [ ] Lethbridge
- [ ] Glenmore
- [ ] South Lethbridge
- [ ] Other

### Education

- [ ] High School
- [ ] College
- [ ] University
- [ ] Less than High School
- [ ] Grade 1-8
- [ ] Grade 9-12
- [ ] Some College
- [ ] Some程度

### Race

- [ ] Caucasian
- [ ] Aboriginal
- [ ] Other

### Gender

- [ ] Male
- [ ] Female

### Children under 18 years of age

- [ ] Yes
- [ ] No

### Other Comments

- [ ] Other

---

**October 31, 2013**
CONFIDENTIALITY FORM

As a condition of my engagement as a volunteer I, ________________________________, agree to maintain confidentiality of all information of a personal, financial, or technical nature disclosed to, or ascertained by me in the performance of my engagement, including any information, policy or knowledge generated as a function of the homeless census conducted on behalf of the City of Lethbridge.

______________________________  ______________________________
Signature                      Date

______________________________  ______________________________
Witness                        Date
Appendix C: Photo Release Consent Form

STANDARD CONSENT FORM FOR DISCLOSURE OF PERSONAL INFORMATION (PHOTOS/VIDEOS)

The signature below indicates my permission for Social Housing in Action (SHIA) and or the City of Lethbridge to use photographs/video footage of me, with or without my name.

I consent to Social Housing in Action (SHIA) and or the City of Lethbridge’s use of photos/video clips of me for any of the following purposes:

- Internal company publications, such as “In Brief” and “In Depth”;
- External disclosure documents such as Annual Reports, Report to the Community, At A Glance brochure or other publicity materials;
- Advertising, sales support, newsletters, and promotional and informational materials;
- Distribution to news media outlets for public broadcast and publication;
- News and media releases;
- Educational presentations or courses;
- External presentations, reports and regulatory filings;
- Content on Social Housing in Action (SHIA) and or the City of Lethbridge internal and external websites

By signing this Consent, I authorize Social Housing in Action (SHIA) and or the City of Lethbridge to use photos/video footage of me for any of the above purposes.

Name: ____________________________________________

Signature: ________________________________

Date: 

Reference: Homeless Census

Photo/Video #:
Appendix D: Homeless Census Agenda

Homeless Census 2013 Itinerary

Below is the detailed itinerary for the evening of the homeless census (subject to change):

1. 5:00pm – Team leader meeting
   a. **Package:**
      • Grids/maps
      • Script/Questionnaire
      • Cell Phone/Contact Numbers
      • Grab Bags
      • Team Sign
   b. **Meeting:**
      • Hand out package
      • Explain contents
      • Explain procedure
      • Answer Questions

2. 5:10pm – Volunteer registration (main foyer of city hall) **ALL VOLUNTEERS MUST REGISTER**
   • Sign in
   • Sign confidentiality oath
   • Sign photo release form
   • Lanyards and Volunteer tags

3. 5:45-6:15 – Hot meal will be served
   • Chili/ Salad/Buns

4. 6:15 – Welcome and Orientation
   • Wally Czech
     o Emergency numbers and Rover explanation
     o Reminder to check in every ½
     o Respect and Rights for Census Volunteers
     o Risks involved
     o Questionnaire/Data Sheet Explanation
   • Team leaders recruit volunteers

5. 6:45-7:00 – Quick meet in foyer
   • Confirm contact phone

6. 7:00-9:00 – Each team will go to their designated mapped area(s) and conduct census

7. 9:00-9:30 – Check-in, Debriefing, and Evaluation
   • Ask volunteers about their experience and safety issues (i.e. injuries)
   • Hot Chocolate and Coffee provided
Appendix E: Homeless Census Safety Orientation Briefing

Homeless Census- Security Briefing

Homelessness is a reflection of and on society. It can be brought about by a variety of circumstances and can be related to financial problems, drug or alcohol dependency, mental health issues, sexual abuse, evasion of arrest or choice of life.

The risks

The risks are potentially higher because you are looking at a small section of society with a higher ratio of the issues that could result in offences.

- A victim of sexual assault or violent abuse will not necessarily want to be identified and thrown back into the same cycle of abuse.
- An offender may fear identification and arrest.
- Your lack of familiarity in dealing with mental illness may cause you to fail to recognise potential warning signals.
- It is possible that some people may be armed. They are carrying all of their worldly goods with them and may feel the need to protect themselves from others.
- If people let you look at where they live, be careful of syringes etc.

The controls

- Keep together as a group.
- Let one person take the lead and have the other observe the body language of the person being spoken to.
- Maintain your personal space when talking to people.
- Do not try and talk over the person who is homeless. This could be misread and interpreted as aggression. Keep your voice calm.
- Trust your instincts and those of your partner. If either of you feels threatened, back off.
- Do not share their food or drink. If they offer, just say politely that you have just had something.
- Always ask before you can take any photograph. Even if you are only taking a photograph of bedding etc, warn them before hand as it will give them an opportunity to step out of frame. If you don’t ask first and all they see is a camera flash, it may make them think that you have taken their picture.

Summary

Regardless of the cause or circumstances, the people who are homeless have the same rights that everyone else have and should be treated with courtesy and respect. If they don’t want to speak to you, respect their choice and leave them alone. Just note their description so that they aren’t included multiple times in the overall count.

Provided you are aware of the risks and use the controls, you should be safe.
Appendix F: 2013 Homeless Census Questionnaire

PROCEDURE:

1. Introduce yourself “Hello, my name is _______________; I am a Volunteer for Social Housing in Action. We are conducting a survey on housing today. I just have some questions to ask you it will only take a minute...Thanks.”

2. Please then ask “have you been asked about your housing situation today?” (If “yes” please thank then and move on to the next person) DO NOT RECORD ANY INFORMATION.
(If not, proceed with the next question)

3. Ask… “Do you have a permanent resident to return tonight? If the answer is “no”, “where will you sleep tonight?” (Use the following as prompts) If the answer is “yes” do not continue with further questions.
(Section 1)

   ● Home
   ● Shelter
   ● Other agency
   ● Relatives/family
   ● Friend/Acquaintance
   ● Hospital
   ● Vehicle
   ● Park/Coulees
   ● Street/Doorway
   ● Other

RECORD SLEEPING PLACE BY CHECKING THE CORRESPONDING BOX

If the answer is “home” record response, thank them, and move on. Do not continue with the rest of the questionnaire.

***Permanent
If the answer is muddled or ambiguous:
If a person is “between places” = homeless
If the person lives at a shelter = homeless
If they are renting = not homeless
If they are visiting Lethbridge, but have a permanent resident elsewhere = not homeless

4. Ask… “Do you have any children under 18 years old? Will they be with you tonight?”
We want to count the number of families and children that are homeless tonight. The children must be physically in the adult’s care on the night of October 3rd to be counted. Ask clarification if you are unsure if the children are actually in the adult’s care or are living elsewhere. (more direction on next page)
**Record yes or no answer in “Family” column of section 12. If the answer is yes, record the number of children, under age of 18, in the “# of Children” column and state the age(s) and sex of the child(ren) in the comment box. (Please go to Section 12)

5. Ask…. “Do you want permanent housing?” (section 2)
If they answer “no” please ask him/her “Are you willing to share with us why you do not want permanent housing?” Please provide his/her response on the qualitative answer sheet attached to the questionnaire/data sheet and proceed with the census.
NOTE: their qualitative response may inform some of the other questions asked in this questionnaire, so these sections may be skipped if they are answered.
6. Ask… “What has kept you from finding a place to live?” (Section 3) (use the following as prompts)
   - Ability to acquire damage/utility deposit
   - Ability to pay rent
   - Employment
   - Social Programs wait list (LHA, Treaty 7, etc)
   - Rental Availability/Accommodation (i.e. size of house, rental location, low vacancy, no access to transportation)
   - Lack of disposable income after rent payment (i.e. no money for food, clothing, etc.)
   - Health and related issues
   - Other

RECORD RESPONSE BY CHECKING CORRESPONDING BOX

7. Ask… “How long have you been homeless?” (Section 4)

RECORD RESPONSE BY CHECKING CORRESPONDING BOX

8. Ask… “How long have you been in Lethbridge?” (Section 5)
   If they respond that they were born in Lethbridge or lived here all their lives, then skip step 9 and 10 and go directly to step 11.

RECORD RESPONSE BY CHECKING CORRESPONDING BOX

9. Ask… “Where did you live before coming to Lethbridge?” (Section 6)

RECORD RESPONSE BY CHECKING CORRESPONDING BOX

10. Ask… “What is your reason for coming to Lethbridge?” (Section 7)

RECORD RESPONSE BY CHECKING CORRESPONDING BOX

11. Ask… “Are you currently employed or going to school?” (Sections 8 & 9)
   If “yes” please ask them to indicate full time, part time, or causal/skills training.
   “Highest education level you obtained?” (Section 10)

RECORD RESPONSE BY CHECKING CORRESPONDING BOX(ES)

12. Ask… “Which age range do you fall into?” (Section 11)
   - 18 & under
   - 19-30
   - 31-59
   - 60+

RECORD RESPONSE BY CHECKING CORRESPONDING BOX

13. Other information – OBSERVATION ONLY, DO NOT ASK (Section 12)

RECORD RESPONSE BY CHECKING CORRESPONDING BOX
   - Record how many families you encounter
   - Record how many children either “on their own” or in family
   - Record the gender of the individual
   - Record if the individual is a visible minority

14. Thank the person for their time and present them with give-away and “Getting Connected Booklet”
Why are we doing the census?

The purpose of the Census is to further define the extent of homelessness in our Community and to compare and benchmark this year’s results with the 2010 Census. The data collected from this study will be used to further meet the needs of persons who are homeless and persons at risk of homelessness in Lethbridge.

What to do if media shows up?

If you are approached by the Media, please do not comment on the Count, how the survey is progressing, or anything else to do with the survey or the people you are interviewing. We are asking the Media to not follow volunteers and film interview with people who are homeless. We are asking the Media to respect people’s privacy. They will be kept informed about the outcome of the census and what it means to the community of Lethbridge. Please direct queries to:

Diane Randell at 403-320-3917 or Diane.Randell@lethbridge.ca
Appendix G: Volunteer Evaluation Form

Homeless Census Volunteer Evaluation

1. Overall I felt the orientation prepared me for the census

   1  2  3  4  5
   Strongly Disagree  Strongly Agree

2. I understood the expectations of my role in the census

   1  2  3  4  5
   Strongly Disagree  Strongly Agree

3. The area that I was responsible for was adequate for the time allotted for the count

   1  2  3  4  5
   Strongly Disagree  Strongly Agree

4. I felt safe with my team

   1  2  3  4  5
   Strongly Disagree  Strongly Agree

5. Comments/Suggestions: ____________________________________________________________
   ______________________________________________________________________________
   ______________________________________________________________________________
   ______________________________________________________________________________
   ______________________________________________________________________________

If you have any additional comments please contact:

Diane Randell  403-320-3917 (diane.randell@lethbridge.ca)
Jerry Firth  403-320-3167 (jerry.firth@lethbridge.ca)