

# Roanoke Valley Alleghany Regional Advisory Council On Homelessness

## Winter Shelter Survey Report January 2009

Prepared by:

Sabrina Simpson, MSW  
And

Daniel W. Merenda



# **2009 Winter Homeless Survey Emergency Shelters, Transitional Housing and Street Count**

Conducted by:

*Roanoke Valley Alleghany Regional Advisory Council on Homelessness*

Dr. Paula Prince, Jefferson College of Health Sciences, Chair

Mr. Allen Barrow, Social Security Administration

Mr. Brian Geiser, City of Roanoke Sheriff's Office

Dr. Kimberly Ferren Carter, Radford University School of Nursing

Mr. John Chambliss, Roanoke County (Dawn Riddle, Representative)

Mrs. Jane Conlin, Director, City of Roanoke Human/Social Services

Captain Curtis Davis, City of Roanoke Police Department

Mr. Ted Edlich, Total Action Against Poverty (Ellen Brown, Representative)

Ms. Pam Kestner-Chappelear, Council of Community Services

Mr. Dan Merenda, Council of Community Services

Ms. Malora Horn, Roanoke City Schools

Mr. Dannie McClain, Formerly Homeless

Mr. Ed McGrath, Blue Ridge Behavioral Healthcare

Ms. Melinda Payne, City of Salem (Ben Tripp, Representative)

Ms. Nancy Reid, Roanoke Gas

Mr. Earl Saunders, Roanoke Housing Authority

Mr. Shane Sawyer, Allegheny Regional Commission

Ms. Gaylene Sanford Salem VA Medical Center

Mr. Curtis Walker, Blue Ridge Independent Living Center

Mr. David Price, Alleghany County Board of Supervisors

Mrs. Harriett Woodward, Alleghany County Social Services

Mr. Bill Burleson, Botetourt County Department of Social Services

Mrs. Carol Tuning, Staff Coordinator

## **Roanoke Valley Alleghany Regional Advisory Council on Homelessness 2009 Winter Shelter Survey**

### **Introduction**

In Virginia, every year each jurisdiction participates in a point in time count of sheltered and unsheltered people experiencing homelessness. In the Commonwealth, the annual point in time count is conducted in January. Typically, the number of people experiencing homelessness over a one year period is four times to five times greater than the point in time count. In Virginia's case that translates into an estimated 38,000 to 48,000 individuals who experienced homelessness in 2007. According to the Virginia Department of Housing and Urban Development's 2007 Report, about 44% of these individuals were in emergency shelters, 34% were in transitional programs and 22% were unsheltered.

Mirroring national trends, last year's 2008 Point in Time Survey reported that the number of individuals experiencing homelessness decreased for the first time in 21 years in the Roanoke Region. This year however, the 2009 Point in Time Survey shows that the number of homeless in the region has increased by 18% to its highest levels in 22 years. Not surprisingly, given the down-turn in the economy, the report shows that greater percentages of the homeless are unemployed and searching for work. While national 2009 Point in Time data are not yet available, it is anticipated that urban areas across America will see increases in homelessness thus erasing gains made in the past year. Examples of increases in the homeless population related to job losses, home foreclosures and a widening recession are evident in places like Sacramento, California where Tent Cities have begun to pop up sending scores of newly homeless people into makeshift camps.

While it is difficult to compare Roanoke with other urban areas in the United States or Virginia, it is safe to say that those seeking employment or who are in need of services and shelter tend to move to urban areas that provide those services. The City of Roanoke is that urban destination for Southwest Virginia. Our survey results, for example, show that more than 50% of the homeless surveyed in Roanoke came from other localities or states. The ratio of homeless to the population in Roanoke City is approximately one to 153, similar to that of other urban areas. For comparative purposes the ratio of homeless to population in Richmond, Virginia is one to 174.

The Advisory Council continues to make every effort to ensure the accuracy of survey data collection. Improvements to survey collection methodology are on-going. For example, this year surveyors conducted interviews and recorded responses as opposed to using paper surveys for respondents to record answers to survey questions thus ensuring more accurate responses to questions. Realizing that the actual number of individuals and families without permanent housing is difficult, if not impossible, to obtain and that numbers vary depending on definitions of homelessness, the Advisory Council continues to concentrate on individuals and families who rely on or are in need of emergency and transitional housing. The Advisory Council acknowledges, but is unable to realistically count or estimate, the sub-population of the hidden homeless who are sharing living space with friends and family, as well as those who remain anonymous and do not wish to be located or assisted.

Finally, the Advisory Council understands that the homeless population is multifaceted and that no single snapshot of a homeless person, or group of homeless people, is representative of the entire homeless population.

### **Methodology**

The procedures utilized to collect information were as consistent as possible with those used in prior surveys. The 2009 survey was changed slightly to a shorter survey, therefore some questions that were asked in prior surveys were not asked in January 2009. Daily adult occupancy totals were collected at participating shelters during the week of January 25-31, 2009. Average nightly totals for the week were 597 individuals experiencing homelessness. Of these 597 individuals two hundred and forty adults (n=240) participated in the survey. Children under the age of 18 were not surveyed. It should be noted that data charts will not always total 240 due to non-response or multiple response by clients. Homeless adult clients were surveyed by agency staff, the Homeless Assistance Team and other volunteers. Shelters were contacted for permission to survey clients with 100% of shelters electing to participate in the survey. These shelters are:

*Overnight shelters:* Rescue Mission, Salvation Army Red Shield Lodge, TRUST House, Total Action Against Poverty Transitional Living Center (TAP-TLC), Roanoke Valley Interfaith Hospitality Network (IHN), Firebase Hope, Salvation Army Turning Point, Safehome Systems and YWCA.

*Day shelters:* Roanoke Area Ministries (RAM) and Samaritan Inn

*Other facilities:* Shenandoah Recovery Center, Roanoke City and County Jail

*Street count:* Unsheltered (Homeless Assistance Team)

**Roanoke Valley Alleghany Regional Advisory Council on Homelessness**  
**2009 Winter Homeless Survey**  
**Key Findings**

- 240 Survey responses were collected (265 last year). Only adults older than 18 were surveyed.
- Nightly Occupancy Averages increased this year over last by 18% [597 compared to 504].
- There was a 4% increase in the number of homeless people coming to Roanoke from other areas.
- Over a 22 year period, homelessness has increased by 389%.
- 5 top challenges experienced by homeless include:
  - Inability to find employment
  - Affordable housing
  - Medical problems
  - Physical disability
  - Dental problems
- 59.8% of Homeless surveyed were male a slight decrease over last year.
- 55.6% of Homeless surveyed were white – 37.2% Black/African American
- 20.8% of Homeless surveyed were veterans (a decrease of 8% over last year)
- 54.6% reported being homeless for less than one year.
- The majority of those homeless (80.4%) reported sleeping in an emergency shelter or transitional shelter last night.
- 39.6% reported never having been homeless before- (43% last year)
- Reasons most frequently cited for current homelessness were:
  - Unemployment
  - Inability to pay rent
  - Domestic violence
  - Family problems
  - Substance abuse
- 17.8% reported having children with them on night of survey
- 28.2% are currently receiving mental health services
- 42.5% reported having received mental health services in the past
- 29.8% reported having received alcohol abuse treatment at some point
- 71.7% had high school/GED education or more
- 27.2% were employed full time or part time
- 29.5% received food stamps
- 50.4% were actively looking for work

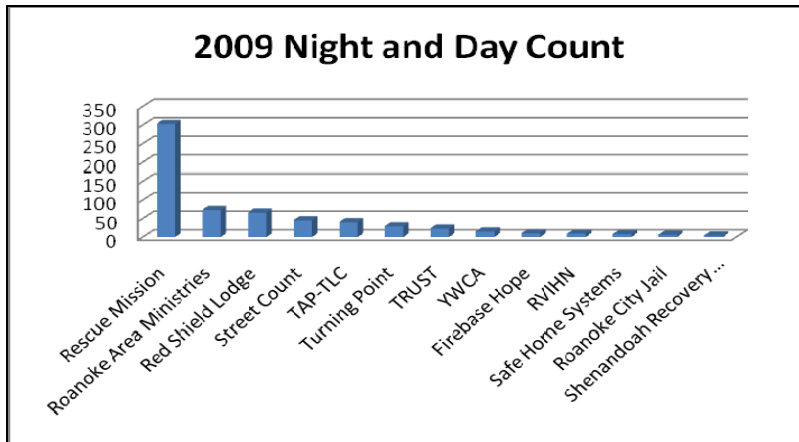
The annual point in time report is composed of three pieces of information- the survey, the nightly average and the total count including populations and subpopulations. The majority of the information contained in this report is from the survey analysis.

### Total Count for January 2009

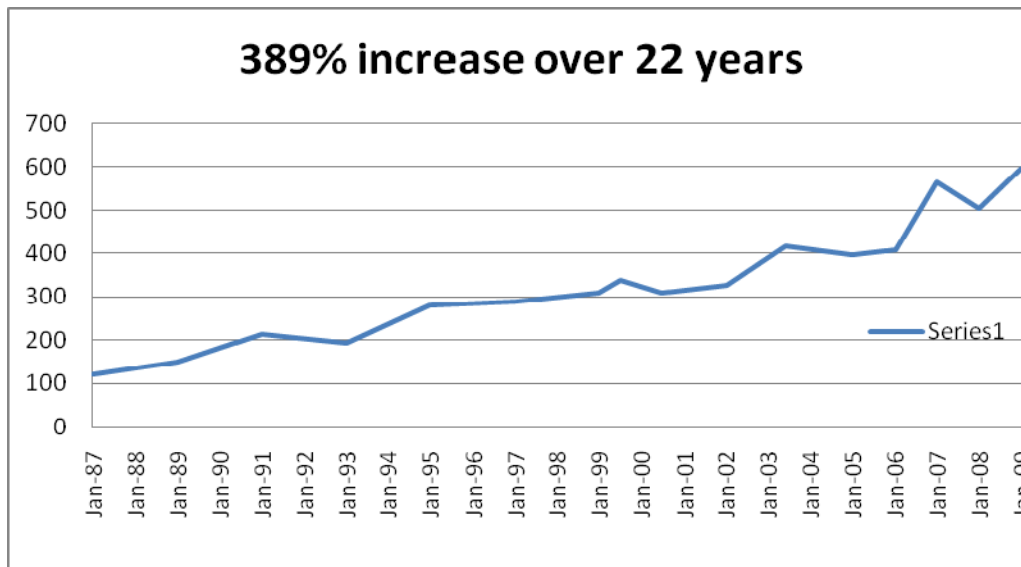
Adults experiencing homelessness- 597

Children experiencing homelessness- 72

This year adults experiencing homelessness totaled 597, a higher number than the Point-in-Time reports have documented in the last 22 years and a stark contrast to the decrease in counts that was reported in 2008 from 2007. The total count for 2009 was an accumulation from 15 shelters, a street count and 1 Jail.



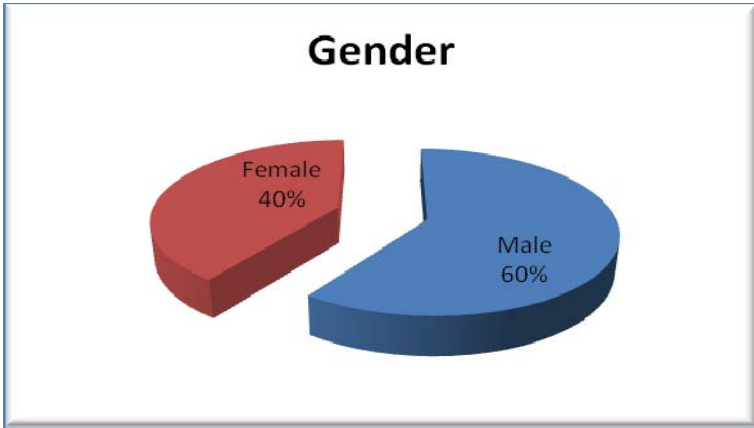
Rescue Mission	303
Roanoke Area Ministries	73
Red Shield Lodge	66
Street Count	11
TAP-TLC	40
Turning Point	29
TRUST	23
YWCA	15
Firebase Hope	10
RVIHN	9
Safe Home Systems	8
Roanoke City Jail	6
Shenandoah Recovery Center	4



Over the last 22 years, people experiencing homelessness has increased 389% from 122 people in 1987 to 597 in 2009.

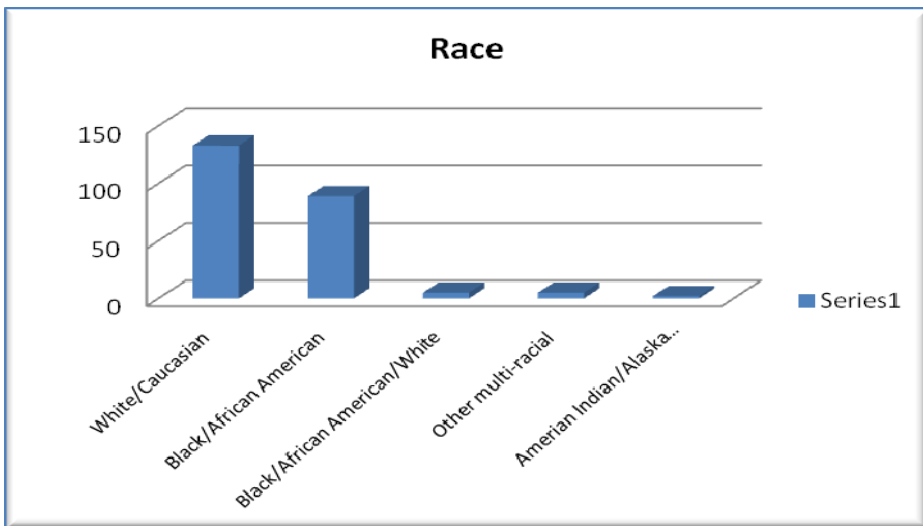
## Survey Results for January 2009

### Demographic Results



The amount of men and women remained relatively the same from last year. It is important to note- this is the ratio of men and women that completed the survey. This is not the ratio of men and women experiencing homelessness.

Male	143	59.8%
Female	96	40.2%



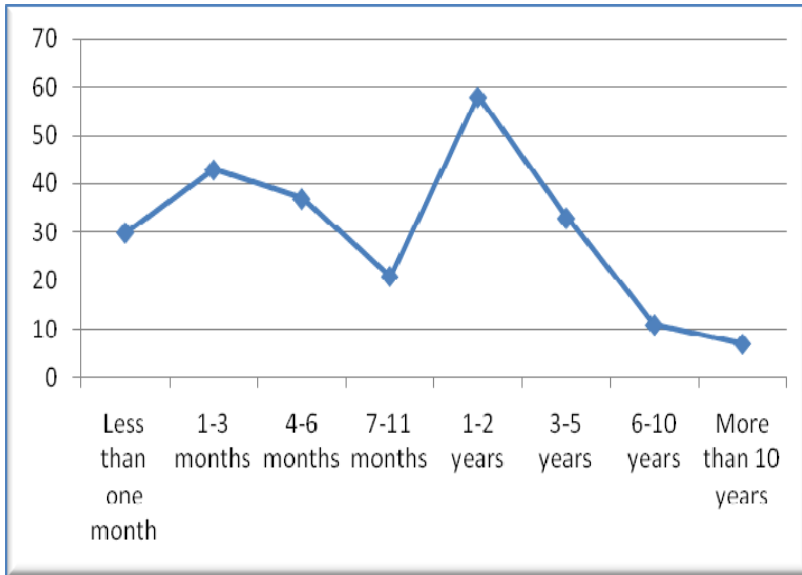
Racial mix continues to be a majority of White/Caucasian. There are four race categories that are not included in the chart or table that were reported by the SPSS results. The categories of- Asian, American Indian/Alaska Native/White, American Indian/Alaska Native/Black and Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander each reported 1.

White/Caucasian	133	55.6%
Black/African American	89	37.2%
Black/African American/White	5	2.1%
Other multi-racial	5	2.1%
American Indian/Alaska Native/White	2	2.1%

### Age

The youngest survey respondent was born in 1990, placing him/her around age 19. The earliest date reported was 1940, which would place someone around the age of 69. In accordance with the baby-boomer phenomenon, the majority of the ages reported- 126 people out of 231 were born between the years 1954-1967 (13 yrs). The other remaining ages fell prior to 1954 or after 1967 (37 yrs).

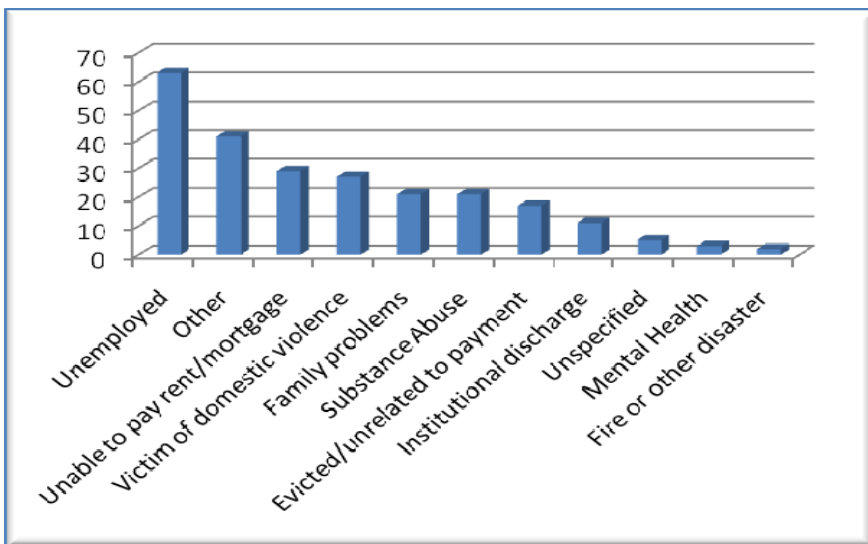
**Question 1- How long has it been since you last had a place to live?**



Less than one month	30	12.5%
1-3 months	43	17.9%
4-6 months	37	15.4%
7-11 months	21	8.8%
1-2 years	58	24.2%
3-5 years	33	13.8%
6-10 years	11	4.6%
More than 10 years	7	2.9%

Last year's question revealed a steady decline after the 4-6 month time indicating that fewer people were experiencing homelessness for extended time periods. This year, there is a steep increase in the amount of people experiencing homelessness for more than 1 year. The number drops slightly in the 3-5 year category almost equal to that of the 4-6 month category.

**Question 2- Please tell us the reason you are currently homeless?**

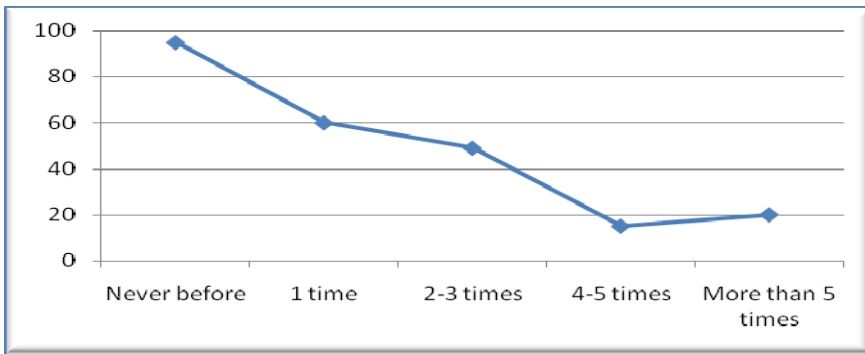


Unemployed	63	26.3%
Other	41	17.1%
Unable to pay rent/mortgage	29	12.1%
Victim of domestic violence	27	11.3%
Family problems	21	8.8%
Substance Abuse	21	8.8%
Evicted/unrelated to payment	17	7.1%
Institutional discharge	11	4.6%
Unspecified	5	2.1%
Mental Health	3	1.3%
Fire or other disaster	2	0.8%

Other, which is the second highest category includes but is not limited to- seizures, choice, jail and condemned house. Some themes that emerged from the other responses such as lost a job or waiting on disability would have been better suited for an already stated category rather than other.



**Question 3- How many times have you been homeless prior to your current situation?**



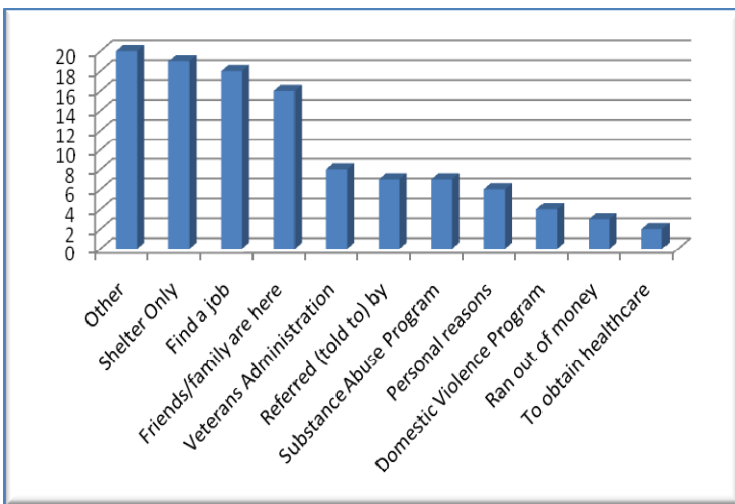
Never before	95	39.6%
1 time	60	25.0%
2-3 times	49	20.4%
4-5 times	15	6.3%
More than 5 times	20	8.3%

**Question 6- Where were you residing when you became homeless?**

Roanoke City	118	49.6%
Other	109	45.8%
Roanoke County/Vinton	6	2.5%
Salem	3	1.3%
Botetourt County	2	0.8%

Of the 109 "Other" responses, 94 told us where they were residing when they became homeless. The data were split into categories as in Virginia or out-of-state. The results were- 59 within the state of Virginia and 34 out of the state of Virginia.

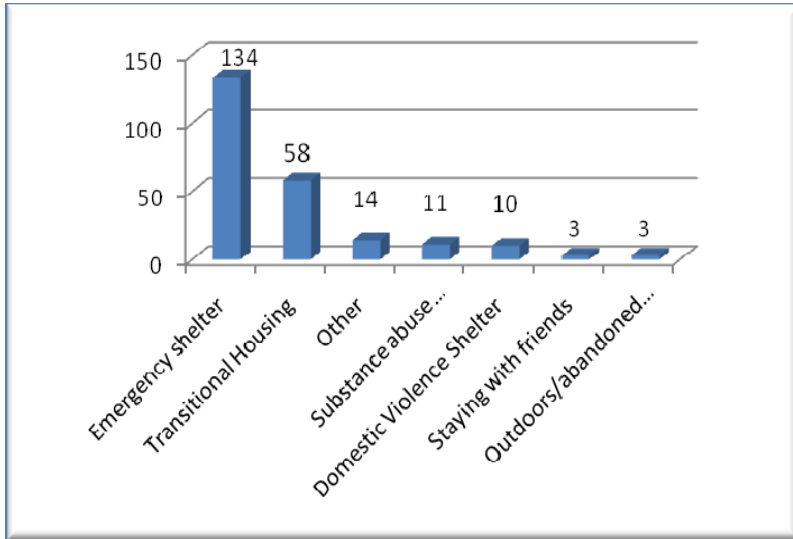
**Question 7- If you became homeless somewhere other than Roanoke, why did you come to Roanoke?**



Other	20	10.6%
Shelter Only	19	10.1%
Find a job	18	9.5%
Friends/family are here	16	8.5%
Veterans Administration	8	4.2%
Referred (told to) by	7	3.7%
Substance Abuse Program	7	3.7%
Personal reasons	6	3.2%
Domestic Violence Program	4	2.1%
Ran out of money	3	1.6%
To obtain healthcare	2	1.1%

Of the 20 that accounted for "Other", some of the responses were- transportation, medical care, more opportunities and looking for work. There were no obvious themes that emerged in the other responses.

**Question 8- Where did you sleep last night?**



Emergency shelter	134	56.1%
Transitional Housing	58	24.3%
Other	14	5.9%
Substance abuse treatment center/detox	11	4.6%
Domestic Violence Shelter	10	4.2%
Staying with friends	3	1.3%
Outdoors/abandoned building/bridge	3	1.3%
Psychiatric facility	1	0.4%
Jail, prison or juvenile detention	1	0.4%
Permanent Supportive Housing	1	0.4%
Hospital (non-psychiatric)	1	0.4%
Staying with family	1	0.4%
Hotel or motel with no voucher	1	0.4%

**Question 9- Have you been denied a bed at a local shelter in the past 12 months?**

Yes	16	6.7%
No	222	93.3%

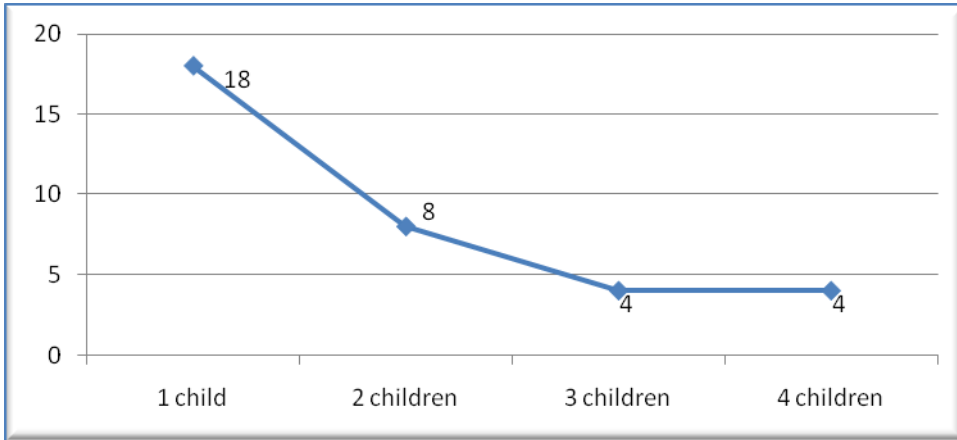
**- If yes, at which location?**

Rescue Mission	8
TRUST	6
Salvation Army Red Shield Lodge	3
Interfaith Hospitality Network	2
Salvation Army Turning Point	1

**- If yes, why?**

Shelter was full	12	12.4%
Other	4	4.1%
Conflicts with staff	2	2.1%
Because of my children	1	0.4%

**Question 10 – How many children under the age of 18 do you have with you?**



1 child	18	9.4%
2 children	8	4.2%
3 children	4	2.1%
4 children	4	2.1%

In comparison to last year, more people this year had 4 children and last year more people had either 1 child or 3 children.

**Question 11 – How many eligible children with you are attending school?**

Attending	18	12.2%
Not Attending	10	6.8%

**Question 12 – How do you handle child care?**

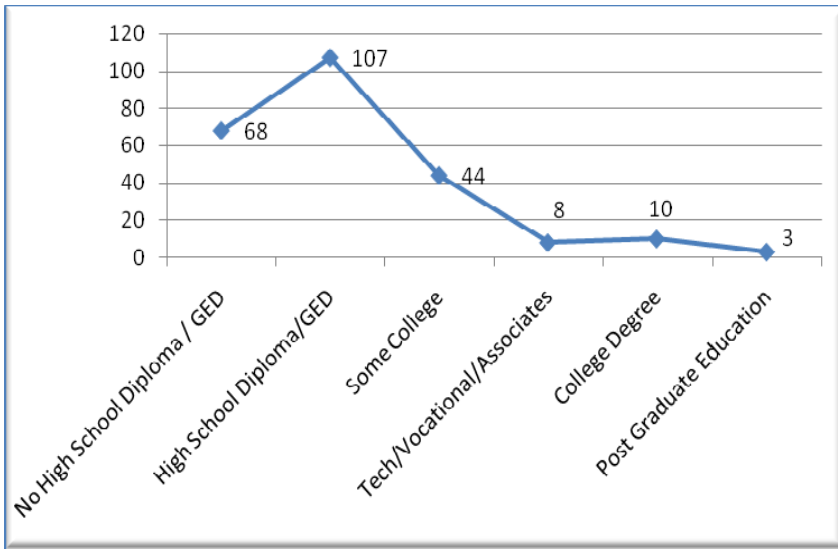
I take care of my children myself	12	7.9%
I do not need childcare	10	6.6%
Friends and family	8	5.3%
Child care center	4	1.7%
Other child care	2	1.3%

**Question 13 – Are you a veteran of the U.S. Military?**

Yes	50	20.9%
No	187	78.2%

This year the number of veterans is down slightly from last year's 28% to this year's 21%.

**Question 14 – What is the highest level of education that you completed?**

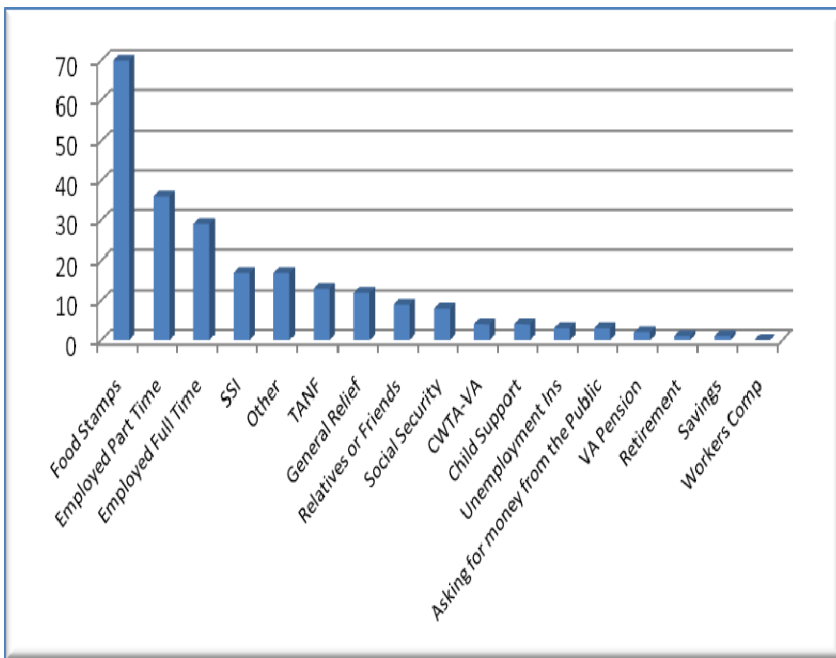


No High School Diploma / GED	68	28.3%
High School Diploma/GED	107	44.6%
Some College	44	18.3%
Tech/Vocational/Associates	8	3.3%
College Degree	10	4.2%
Post Graduate Education	3	1.3%

Similar to last year, this year almost 72% of the people had a High School diploma or more.

**Question 15 – What sources of income have you used in the last 6 months?**

Although employed full time or part time ranks 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> on the overall list of incomes in the last 6 months, the percent of people working full time or part time dropped to 27% from last year's 46%.



Food Stamps	70	29.5%
Employed Part Time	36	15.1%
Employed Full Time	29	12.1%
SSI	17	7.1%
Other	17	7.1%
TANF	13.0	5.5%
General Relief	12.0	5.0%
Relatives or Friends	9.0	3.8%
Social Security	8.0	3.3%
CWTA-VA	4.0	1.7%
Child Support	4.0	1.7%
Unemployment Ins	3.0	1.3%
Asking for money from the Public	3.0	1.3%
VA Pension	2.0	0.8%
Retirement	1.0	0.4%
Savings	1.0	0.4%
Workers Comp	0.0	0.0%

**Question 16 – If working, what is your hourly wage?**

\$2.00	Lowest
\$12.00	Highest
\$7.00	Median

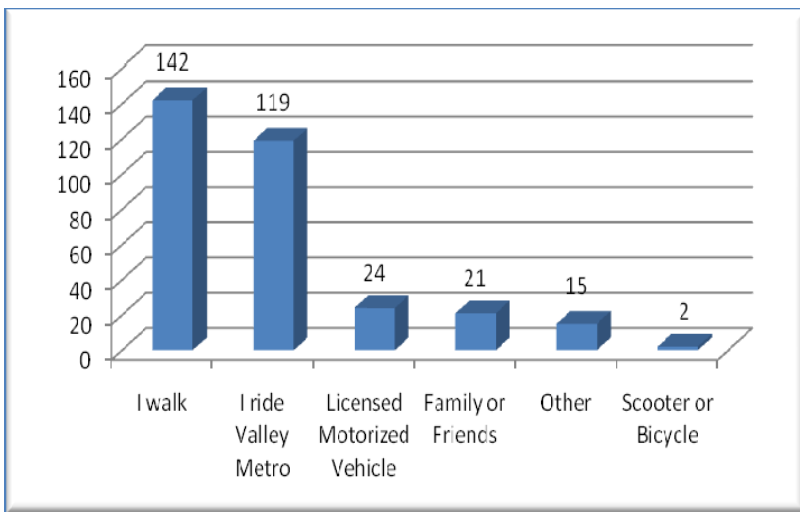
48 hourly wages were reported. Of those, \$2.00 was the lowest wage and \$12.00 was the highest wage. Even with last year reporting the highest wage being \$20.00 an hour the median income stayed relatively the same with \$7.88 /hr in 2008 and \$7.00 /hr in 2009.

**Question 17 – Are you actively looking for work?**

Yes	117	50.4%
No	79	34.1%

Compared to last year, more people are looking for work and fewer people are actually working. Last year- 46% were working and 40% were looking for work. This year 27% of people are working and 50.4% are actively looking for work.

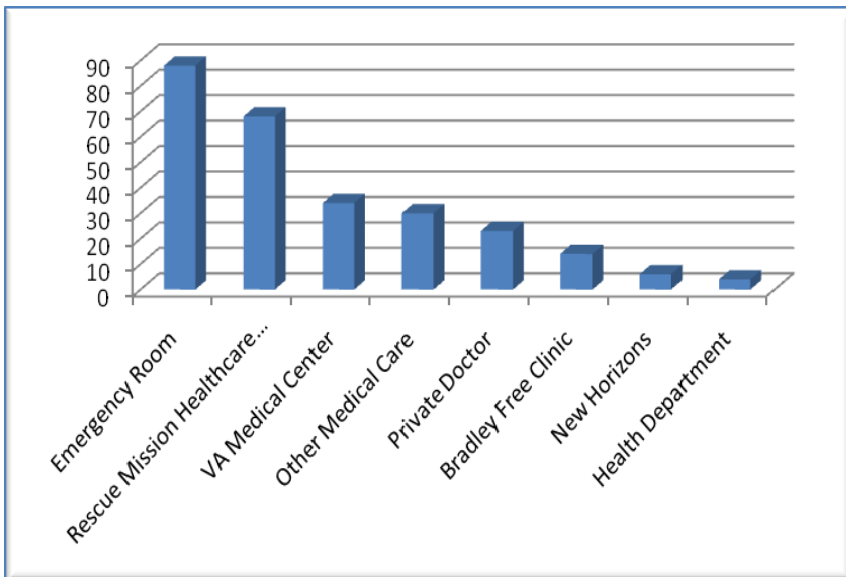
**Question 18 – How do you mainly get around?**



I walk	142	59.4%
I ride Valley Metro	119	49.8%
Licensed Motorized Vehicle	24	10.0%
Family or Friends	21	8.8%
Other	15	6.3%
Scooter or Bicycle	2	0.8%

The majority of people from one year to the next either walk or ride Valley Metro.

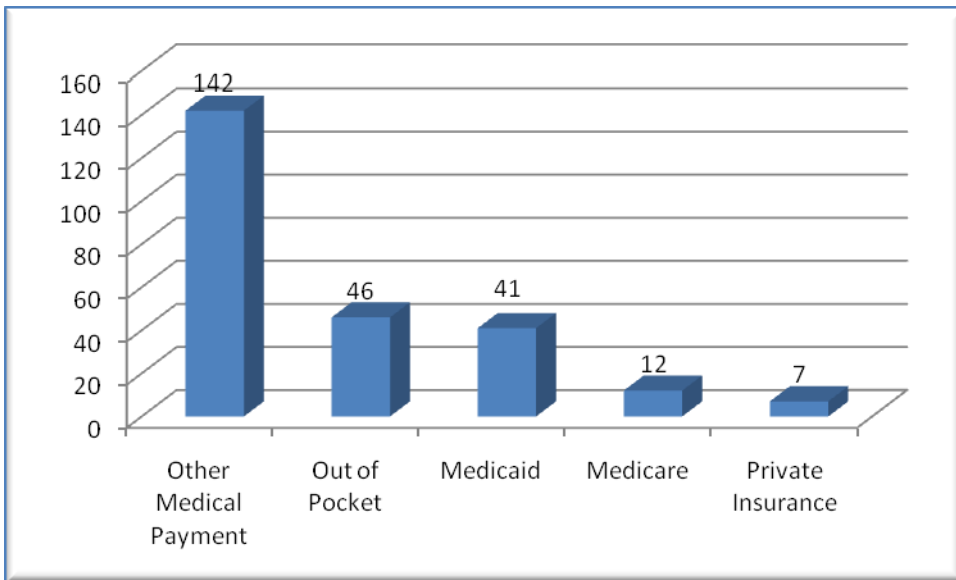
**Question 19 – If you get sick, where do you go for medical treatment?**



Emergency Room	88	37.0%
Rescue Mission Healthcare Center	68	28.7%
VA Medical Center	34	14.3%
Other Medical Care	30	12.6%
Private Doctor	23	9.7%
Bradley Free Clinic	14	5.9%
New Horizons	6	2.5%
Health Department	4	1.7%

The 30 responses in "other" category included mainly hospitals or urgent care.

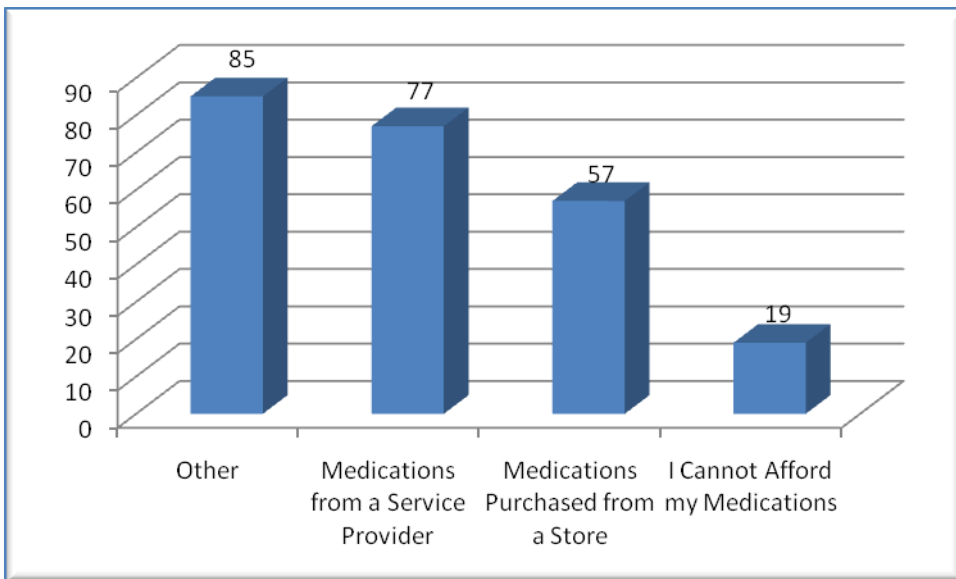
**Question 20 – How do you pay for medical care?**



Other Medical Payment	142	59.9%
Out of Pocket	46	19.3%
Medicaid	41	17.2%
Medicare	12	5.1%
Private Insurance	7	2.9%

Of the 142 other medical payment responses- 91 were accounted for by the following: VAMC [31], Don't pay [22], Charity care [20] and Rescue Mission [18].

**Question 21 – How do you obtain your medications?**



Other	85	35.4%
Medications from a Service Provider	77	32.1%
Medications Purchased from a Store	57	23.8%
I Cannot Afford my Medications	19	7.9%

Although 85 other responses were reported only 53 were recorded. Of those 53, the main "other" response was VAMC [26]. The remaining "other" responses included things like Rescue Mission [4], Wal-Mart,

**Question 22 – Are you currently receiving mental health services?**

Yes	67	28.2%
No	171	71.8%

**Question 23 – Have you previously received mental health services?**

Yes	102	42.5%
No	138	57.5%

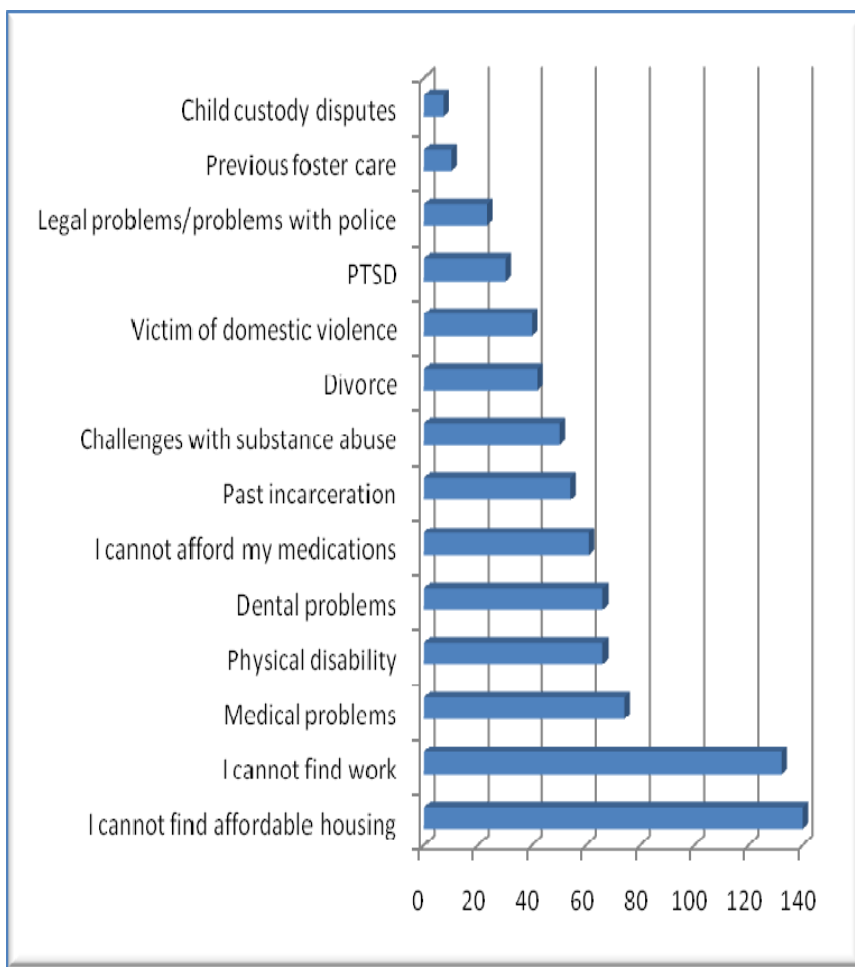
**Question 24 – Have you ever received treatment for problems related to alcohol?**

Yes	71	29.8%
No	167	70.2%

**Question 25 – Have you ever been treated for drug dependency?**

Yes	64	26.7%
No	176	73.3%

**Question 26 – Common characteristics and challenges experienced by those without a home-**



I cannot find affordable housing	140	60.1%
I cannot find work	132	56.4%
Medical problems	74.0	31.8%
Physical disability	66.0	28.3%
Dental problems	66	28.3%
I cannot afford my medications	61	26.2%
Past incarceration	54	23.2%
Challenges with substance abuse	50	21.5%
Divorce	42	18.0%
Victim of domestic violence	40	17.2%
PTSD	30.0	12.9%
Legal problems/problems with police	23.0	9.9%
Previous foster care	10	4.3%
Child custody disputes	7	3.0%

## 2009 Comments or Thoughts about Being Without Housing

- Find a two bedroom apartment for him and his daughter. (She is not currently living with him.
- Trying to find housing. Would like to get into Melrose.
- Need child care here. Without housing, stress multiplies on itself.
- Hard to find a safe place to live.
- Landlord required two months rent instead of one months rent, just did not have the money.
- It scares her – doesn't know a lot about resources available to her. Cost of housing is a road block.
- Frustration because cannot find safe housing.
- Its been very hard, hard to adjust without a place of her own with children, in and out of jobs, had to face a lot of challenges
- Doing their best to try to get housing. Its been stressful being homeless.
- In the overall picture they do a great deal for you when you're homeless. However, I wish there was more help for single people since we get a lot less help than families do.
- Just wants a place of her own.
- Would really like to have a house or an apartment.
- Its hard to find help because a lot of agencies don't share information about what's really out there to help you.
- A place to get a complete physical. Better public transportation so people can work 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> shift.
- Resources in the area are helpful.
- Red Shield has been really helpful – place to stay and employment – provides opportunity to minister to others.
- Would like to find a job
- Would like to find work and housing (does not want to live in PH)
- Denied subsidized housing due to criminal history; need dentures.
- This is just temporary. I will get an apartment.
- Would be better off if mental health services were improved (easier to access)
- Only second time here, actively looking for housing.
- Sad that jobs are so scarce where you can't find a job.
- Roanoke services much better than Winchester.
- Really hope that things pick up.
- Should be something better as far as housing (rooming house/motel)
- Paying job, need better ID
- I'm glad that I've gone through it – what doesn't kill you makes you stronger.
- It sucks
- I need an affordable place to live.
- I will be glad to find housing.
- Its hard when you have to live under someone else's roof and not be independent.
- Trust House is a very good transitional housing experience. I don't know of any better facility or staff.
- My comments are, there is nothing, absolutely nothing that can compare to having



your own home and when I am in my own home, I will not take it for granted. My word!

- I've got bad credit and can't get approved with any realtors for apartments, or cause I am a felon and don't get approved. So, wtf!
- We can be responsible and accountable if things were affordable and livable.
- I will be happy when I get a new job and home.
- Through God all things are possible.
- I am at SRC. I need a place to live once I leave SRC.
- It sucks.
- I need help in getting benefits from my husbands retirement which was not received in my divorce because there was never a property settlement made.
- I am 8 months pregnant with no money and don't drive so I can't find work at this moment.
- It sucks.
- I don't feel like a human being.
- I think that they should not look at your credit if you are trying to make ends meet.
- Thankful for Salvation Army.
- Glad there are resources (homeless shelters and transitional living centers). Believes they need improvement i.e. keeping others from taking your things; people take food – suggest video cameras to monitor – roaches (but not that bad).
- With the state of the economy, don't feel as bad about needing help as before – need ing help to get back on your feet.
- Would rather be living in her own home; it is good to have a place like the YWCA for those in need.
- Need more government help to obtain housing – single people on minimum wage cannot afford housing.
- I feel lost without my home.
- I would like to be able to afford housing but not at this time. I enjoy here at the YWCA. I try to make the best of every situation.
- Very hard to find housing due to credit problems. Limited housing.
- Very frustrating, no jobs in Roanoke.
- Affordable housing is very hard to find with limited income.
- I feel secure here at the YWCA.
- Need HUD to provide housing for those getting GR and waiting for disability
- I don't like it I want my own home
- Wish there were more state funded programs available
- The Commonwealth sucks! frustrating
- Need ID card
- Should be more options for couples, but still thankful for what she has
- I just want a full time job
- It doesn't allow you independence. Nothing to call your own, no privacy
- Need own apartment, people drunk at shelter—hard to sleep
- I need to get an ID in order to get a job.
- Having trouble getting birth record (VA)
- Economic hardship – hard to find work
- Frustrating – low income housing for people w/out good credit
- More Section 8 housing

- Takes time to get out of situation
- HAT Team services are very good. The local shelters are very helpful.
- Need more subsidized housing in Roanoke
- It is extremely difficult
- Stressful living in a shelter – lack of privacy
- A very scary feeling; wondering if you will always live this way; economy makes things even scarier.
- Rescue Mission is a safe haven
- Good to have a place to stay @ Rescue Mission
- Rescue Mission is a blessing
- Not being able to obtain housing because of credit
- Waiting on disability
- Sometimes it's very hard to deal with
- It's very humbling
- Although I have been homeless off and on for 30 years, most of that time was in the wilderness. I worked at day labor for supplies and camped out. I came into shelter for showers and medical treatment.
- I have prostate cancer and irregular heart beat, psasars on over 90% of my body
- It's terrible
- Wish there was more affordable housing for working and single people
- Brutal winter! Rescue Mission is great facility
- It sucks! Used to working
- Please help me find a job!
- It ain't the same. Whole new experience
- I always thought that if I were homeless there would be more services available