



HOMELESS REPORT TO CITY COUNCIL

December 3, 2018

ABSTRACT

Provides an update on regional initiatives surrounding homelessness, an overview of the Homeless Crisis Resolution System in the Denver-metropolitan area.

Kate Skarbek

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This report provides an update on regional initiatives surrounding homelessness and an overview of the Homeless Crisis Resolution System in the Denver-metropolitan area.

WESTMINSTER-SPECIFIC INFORMATION: A SUMMARY

Based on Westminster's population percentage of both Adams and Jefferson Counties, Westminster likely has 110 people living in places not intended for human habitation on any given night.

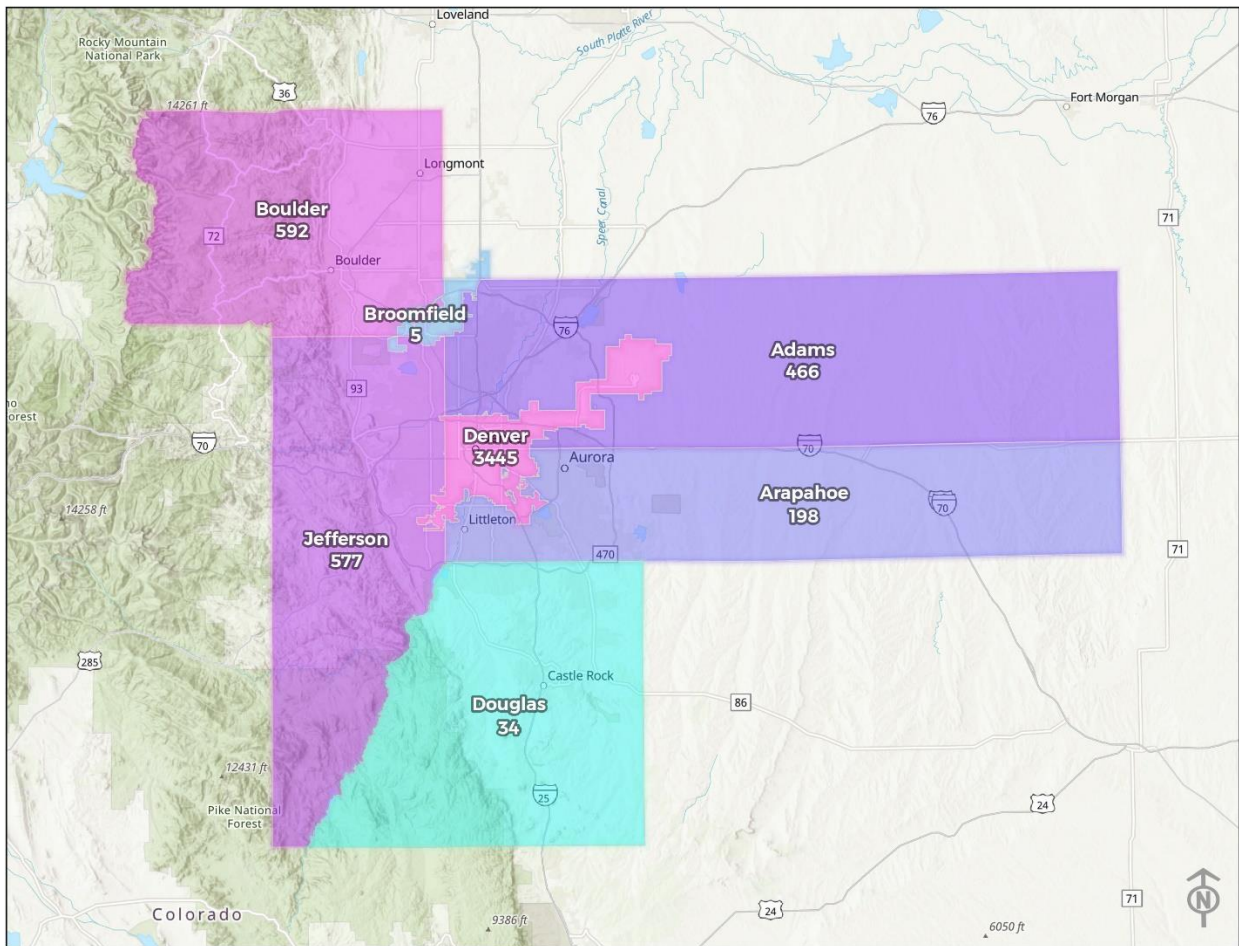
The 2019 Point-in-Time annual census of those who are living in places not intended for human habitation is scheduled for Monday, January 28, 2019. Westminster will host its second annual Everyone Counts Event at the Swim and Fitness Center from 5 – 8 p.m. that night. Westminster's 2018 event was so successful that the Metro Denver Homeless Initiative asked Kate Skarbek, the Westminster Homeless Liaison, to present to all seven counties across the region on how to conduct an indoor event to encourage people participating in the census survey.

Based on Westminster's population percentage being served by each of the three school districts partially serving Westminster – Adams 12 Five Star Schools, Jefferson County Public Schools and Westminster Public Schools, Westminster likely has slightly over 1,000 homeless school-age children.

Fewer shelter beds are available in Adams and Jefferson County this year than last for reasons outlined in the report. City Staff are assessing what role Westminster might play in helping address this shortfall over time.

2018 POINT IN TIME SURVEY RESULTS

In June, the Metro Denver Homeless Initiative (MDHI) released the 2018 results of the census of those who are living outdoors, in shelters, in vehicles, or in areas not intended for human habitation. This annual census is conducted on the final Monday in January; in 2018, this census was conducted on January 29. The Denver metro total number of homeless increased slightly over 2017 from 5,116 to 5,317 people meeting this specific definition of homelessness. The metro-wide report has been released at https://www.mdhi.org/pit_reports. The Adams County and Jefferson County reports are available at the same site and direct links are provided in the Resources section of this report to Westminster City Council. The seven counties identified the following number of people who are without homes:



As discussed in the February 26, 2018 report to City Council on homelessness, the methodology of the Point-in-Time count presents many challenges. The chief obstacle is trying to locate and survey everyone who is living outdoors on a single night when the geographic area to be canvassed spans almost 2,000 square miles between both Adams and Jefferson Counties.

Perhaps of most significance in the metro-wide report is the increase in unsheltered homelessness, which rose from 924 in 2017 to 1,308 in 2018, an increase of 41.6%. Robust

efforts in Adams County and Jefferson County to better connect with those persons living outdoors. The magnet events offering services to the unsheltered homeless population are largely credited with obtaining what is believed to be a more accurate count than in years past. Westminster held one such magnet event at the Swim and Fitness Center where free showers, a warm meal, haircuts, bus tickets and donated giveaways were distributed.

Across Adams County, 466 people were identified as homeless, an increase of 196.8% over the previous year, while in Jefferson County, 577 were identified, an increase of 46.4% over 2017. Based on comments from homeless service providers and law enforcement, these are not believed to be actual increases, but are instead thought to be a more accurate reflection of what the community has been reporting for the last several years. Supporting this is the fact that most of those persons who were identified as homeless were not newly homeless, with only 31.5% of those in Adams and 13.7% of those in Jefferson County identifying as having been homeless for less than a year.

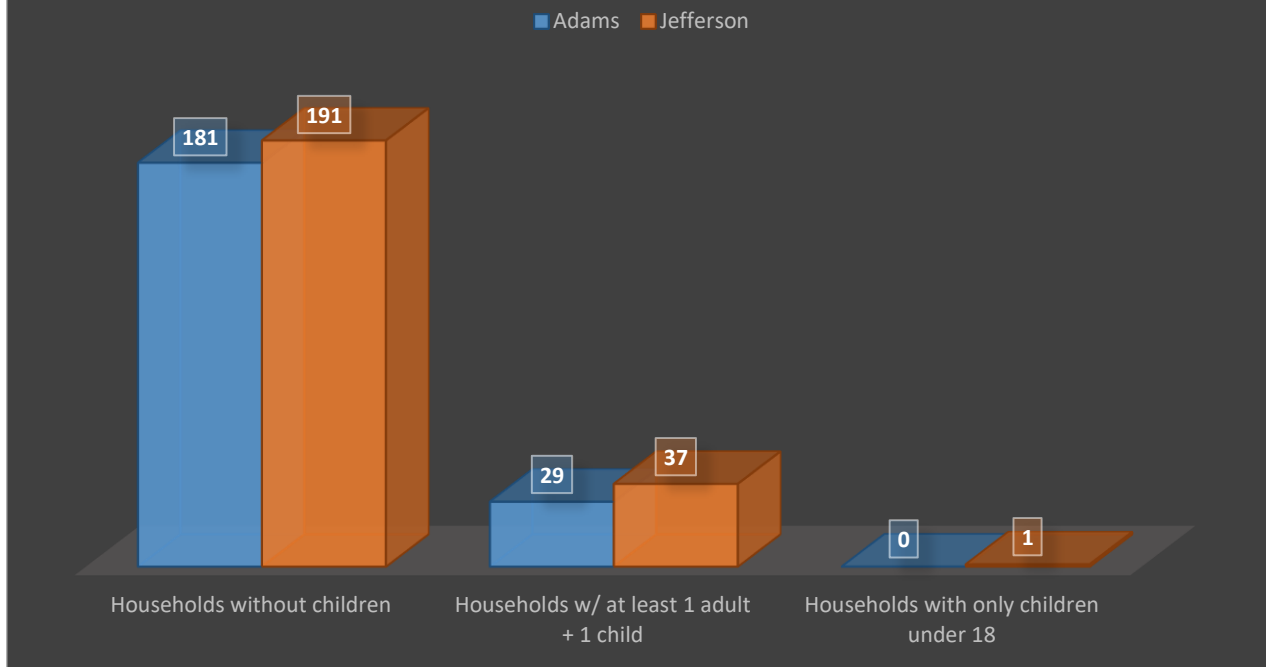
In Adams County, “over two-thirds (317 or 68.0%) of those surveyed during the count were single individuals. The majority of these single individuals, 57.1%, stayed in an unsheltered location. Almost four-fifths of families (79.2%) stayed in emergency shelters” (MDHI AdCo Report, p. 3). Those families who did not stay in an emergency shelter were living outdoors, in cars, or in areas not intended for human habitation.

In Jefferson County, families were 51.3% and individuals were 48.7% of those surveyed the night of the Point in Time count. “Nearly 40% of [homeless] persons overall were experiencing homelessness while living in unsheltered situations” (MDHI JeffCo, p. 3).

Between both Adams and Jefferson Counties, 1,043 people were identified as living in areas not intended for human habitation or in a location paid for by an agency. Based on the City of Westminster’s proportion of the population of each county, Westminster may have as many as 110 people meeting the strict definition of homelessness on a given night.

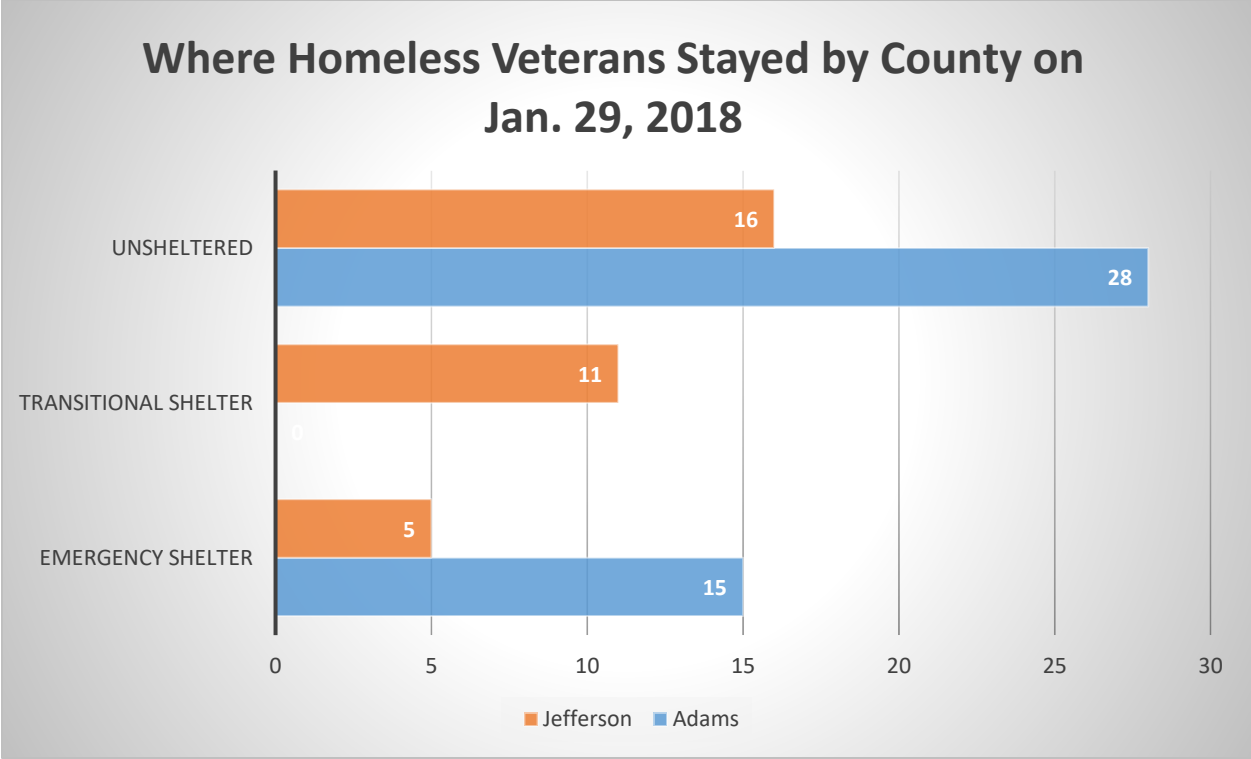
Those who are most at risk are people living in unsheltered conditions. Unsheltered is defined by the Housing and Urban Development Department (HUD) as “...living on the street, under a bridge, in an abandoned or public building, in a car, in an outdoor camp, or in any other place that is not meant for human habitation” (MDHI AdCo and JeffCo Reports, p. 5). In Adams County, a total of 210 households, or 45.1% of the households surveyed, were living in unsheltered conditions. In Jefferson County, a total of 229 households, or 39.7% of the households surveyed, were found to be living on the street, under a bridge, in an abandoned building, in a car, or any other place not intended for human habitation. The overwhelming majority of households living in unsheltered locations were ones without children as shown in the following chart.

UNSHELTERED HOUSEHOLDS ON JAN. 29, 2018



VETERANS WHO ARE HOMELESS IN EACH COUNTY.

In Adams County, 43 people identified as a veteran, whereas in Jefferson County, 32 people identified as veterans. The majority of veterans who were identified on the night of the Point in Time count were living in unsheltered conditions. In Adams County, 65.1% of the homeless veterans and 50.0% of the homeless veterans in Jefferson County stayed in places not intended for human habitation.



Nationally, veterans are one subpopulation of those who are homeless that show signs of improvement. “HUD’s Annual Homeless Assessment Report (AHAR) finds the total number of reported veterans experiencing homelessness in 2018 decreased 5.4 percent since last year, falling to nearly half of the number of homeless veterans reported in 2010.” (HUD Newsletter).

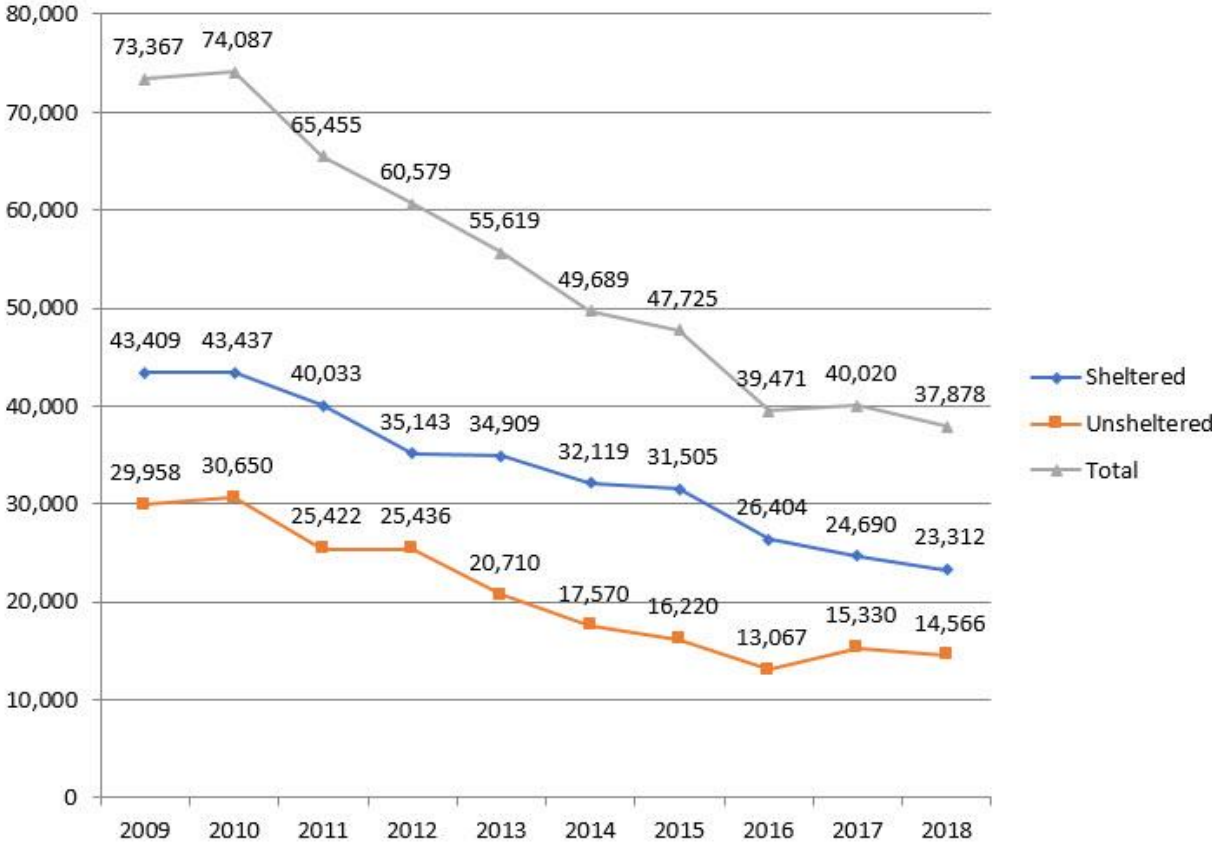
This is largely attributed to one program created across agencies aimed at specifically reducing homelessness over the last 10 years:

The HUD-Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing (HUD-VASH) program combines Housing Choice Voucher (HCV) rental assistance for homeless Veterans with case management and clinical services provided by the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). VA provides these services for participating Veterans at VA medical centers (VAMCs) and community-based outreach clinics.

Every year since 2008, HUD and VA have awarded HUD-VASH vouchers based on geographic need and public housing agency (PHA) administrative performance.... Since 2008, a total of over 93,000 vouchers have been awarded. (HUD-VASH Vouchers).

According to the November 1, 2018 HUD Exchange Newsletter “HUD estimates among the total number of reported veterans experiencing homelessness in 2018, 23,312 veterans were found in sheltered settings while volunteers counted 14,566 veterans living in places not meant for human habitation.” This equates to 38.5% of veterans counted as homeless were unsheltered nationally while 58.3% were unsheltered in Adams and Jefferson Counties. The national trends over the last decade are promising while there is still room for improvement:

Veteran Homelessness

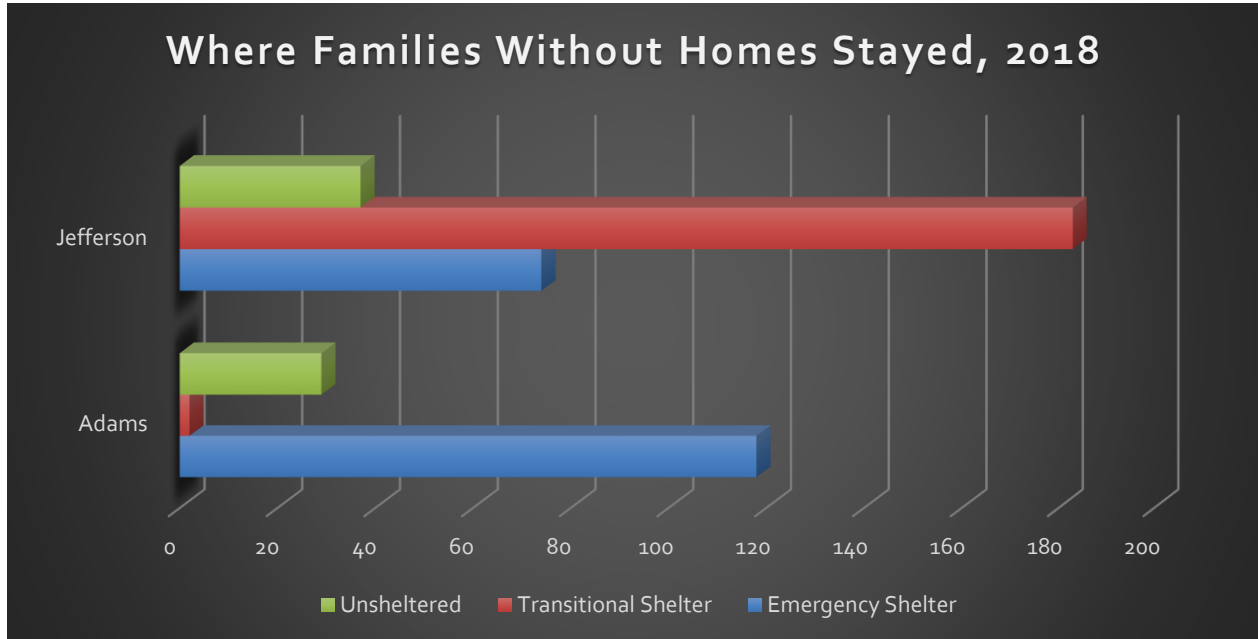


Source: HUD Newsletter.

This overall positive trend does highlight that housing with the appropriate supportive services does solve homelessness. This type of model – housing with support services – without requirements for being sober or meeting other criteria is what is known worldwide as Housing First.

FAMILIES WITHOUT HOMES

How many and where families stayed the night of the Point in Time count was the most significant difference between Adams and Jefferson Counties. Only 32% or 149 of homeless households were families in Adams County, while 51% of homeless households in Jefferson County were families with at least one child under the age of 19. The total number of families meeting the Point-in-Time count definition of homelessness was 443 between the two counties.



The 2019 Point in Time count is planned from sundown on Monday, January 28, to sundown on Tuesday, January 29, 2019. Once again, Westminster will hold an Everyone Counts magnet event at the Swim and Fitness Center.

SCHOOL CHILDREN WHO ARE WITHOUT HOMES

The number of pre-kindergarten through twelfth grade students meeting the Department of Education's definition of homelessness was released in July for the 2016-17 academic year. This definition includes not only those meeting the HUD-definition of homelessness, but also those students who are doubled and tripled up, with more than one family living in a space intended for one for financial reasons. The Department of Education continues to track these living conditions of students since they are 400% less likely to graduate from high school than their stably housed peers. They also are 20% more likely to have a chronic health condition, often respiratory, following them into adulthood.

Adams County continues to lead the state in the most number of students meeting this variation of homeless with a total of 3,608 and Jefferson County coming in second at 2,825. A look at the seven Adams County school districts by type of homelessness:

District Name	Shelters, transitional housing, awaiting foster care	Doubled-up because of economic hardship	Unsheltered	Hotels or Motels	Total
Mapleton 1	6	109	6	9	130
Adams 12	80	1,329	13	41	1,463
Adams 14	31	459	11	29	530
Brighton 27J	74	213	4	21	312
Bennett 29J	0	20	0	2	22
Strasburg 31J	0	21	0	0	21
WPS	30	1,044	33	23	1,130
Adams Total	221	3,195	67	125	3,608

The two counties account for 29.3% of Colorado’s 21,943 homeless pre-K through twelfth grade students. During the 2016-17 school year, Colorado counted a total of 905,019 pre-K through twelfth grade students with just over 2.4% of them qualifying as homeless. Adams and Jefferson Counties accounted for a total of 170,268 students or 18.8% of the state’s pre-K through twelfth grade students. Therefore, looked at based on population size, the two counties Westminster is within account for a disproportionately high ratio of homeless students.

The two Adams County school districts serving Westminster are the two districts reporting not only the highest number of total students meeting the Department of Education’s definition of homelessness but also the highest number of unsheltered students. By adding the Jefferson County data to only the two Adams County school districts serving Westminster, a more complete picture comes into view:

District	Shelters, transitional housing, awaiting foster care	Doubled-up because of economic hardship	Unsheltered	Hotels or Motels	Total Homeless Students	Total Students
Adams 12	80	1,329	13	41	1,463	38,818
Jefferson	251	2,228	90	256	2,825	86,347
WPS	0	1,044	33	23	1,130	9,638
Totals	330	4,613	107	416	5,418	134,803

Each school district identified the following percentage of homeless students: Adams 12 Five Star Schools 3.7%, Jefferson County School District 3.3% and Westminster Public Schools (WPS) 11.7%. Yet, the Free and Reduced Rate (F&RR) is not quite as disparate with Adams 12 having 39.4% of students qualifying, Jefferson having 31.9% and Westminster Public Schools having 81.4% meeting the criteria for this program which is based on federally established income levels.

ADAMS AND JEFFERSON COUNTY UPDATES

This is a time of transition for issues surrounding homelessness in both Adams and Jefferson counties.

Currently, agencies in both counties are independently discussing the need for street outreach. The need for a day shelter continues to arise in both counties as well. The need for homelessness prevention funds is a recurring theme in both areas. Adams County recently released more than \$300,000 in additional rental assistance funds to Almost Home, a non-profit homeless service provider, to distribute. In Adams County, there is a growing sense of favor with tiny homes as a potential type of housing to stabilize individuals sooner rather than later.

SHELTER PROGRAMS

In both Adams County and Jefferson County, there are several sheltering programs, mainly serving families. These sheltering programs require pre-registration, criminal background checks be conducted on all the adults entering the program, and that the adults in the program be actively working toward housing solutions for their families.

The Growing Home Canopy Program, a rotational program operating in Adams County, is in need of a new backup overnight space. When Growing Home has a week without a faith-based partner with space to physically host the families, the partners' volunteers were using overnight space at the Rocky Mountain Synod Lutheran Center in unincorporated Adams County, which also serves as Growing Home's Day Center. There, volunteers from congregations or other organizations without adequate space to accommodate guests come in to provide meals and stay the night in case anything is needed. Adams County has called into question if the current usage is in compliance with building codes, and since late-May has required that all overnights cease at this location for the time being. As of July 11, 2018, ongoing conversations were taking place between Adams County, Growing Home, and the church to see if a viable resolution for all parties can be reached. In the meantime, other churches have stepped up and are offering their space for additional weeks to physically host the families so the program may continue. Growing Home has been able to put a short-term plan in place.

In June, The Action Center in Jefferson County announced it was closing its homeless shelter program with 22 beds by the end of the month because of a funding shortfall. Jefferson County Health and Human Services staff worked with the shelter staff to ensure the people staying there were placed in permanent housing or, when that was not possible, in motels with ongoing case management in an effort to reduce the trauma of yet more instability. Fortunately, only 13 clients were enrolled in the program when it closed.

Meanwhile, Family Cold Weather Shelter operated by Mean Street Ministries has achieved tremendous success and navigated several challenges this year. Those families that were staying

at the shelter at the end of the official cold-weather season in April were placed in permanent housing through a partnership effort with Jefferson County Health and Human Services and the Arvada Housing Authority.

At the same time that partnership was established, Mean Street Ministry faced a challenge when the landlord said its operations could no longer continue at the site used for the shelter. At least in part, this was because the West Metro Fire District Marshall identified several safety concerns at this site. After much discussion – and no citation – Mean Street Ministry worked over the summer months to identify several other sites that they can rotate the shelter on a weekly basis, much like the Growing Home model. As of early November, no announcement had been made about the shelter opening this season. However, the Jefferson County Child and Youth Leadership Commission (CYLC) on October 11, 2018, did vote to approve funding for Mean Street’s shelter coordinator position provided certain criteria are met.

During the summer, the West Metro Fire District Marshall also realized the scope of sheltering taking place in churches in its jurisdiction on extreme weather nights as part of the Severe Weather Shelter Network, a non-profit working with faith-based organizations. After talking with the shelter providers, the non-profit, and various other agencies in the area, the fire marshal identified interim solutions to keep shelter beds available while long-term solutions are sought across the county. This is being handled on a jurisdiction by jurisdiction basis with the appropriate building division.

The Jefferson County Severe Weather Network, a workgroup of Jefferson County Heading Home, convened over the summer and fall every two weeks to find possible ways forward with the fire marshal.

The unfortunate result of all of this is a significant reduction in places homeless persons may safely stay in Jefferson County and Adams County as well. City Staff are engaging in internal discussions to determine what policy revisions to recommend to City Council to lay a foundation for partner agencies to be able to deliver services in Westminster. Other municipalities in both counties have expressed interest in viewing what Westminster proposes as a model to consider for replication.

Within the last few months, conversations around Safe Parking Programs were initiated in Adams County, including at one church in Westminster. These are programs that provide safe and legal overnight parking accommodations in designated public and private lots for homeless individuals and families who are living in their campers, cars, or other vehicles. Shower facilities, sanitation and trash pickup, access to potable water, and other amenities may be available.

ADAMS AND JEFFERSON COUNTY HOMELESS POSITIONS

Adams County hired a new homelessness liaison in September. The position is now housed in the County Manager’s Office and will report to the Poverty Reduction and Neighborhood Outreach Manager, a position being moved from the Department of Human Services, after being filled in August. With both Adams County positions now filled, conversations around how to address homelessness on a county-wide basis are moving forward. While the positions were vacant, the municipal staff workgroup for Adams County continued to meet on a monthly basis, with the various municipalities alternating hosting responsibilities.

The City of Thornton created a full-time homelessness position in the Community Outreach Division and is currently hiring outreach staff to connect people living outdoors to services. This effort is in collaboration with the Thornton Police Department.

The Jefferson County homelessness position will likely be filled after it is moved to another division of the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). Since its inception in early 2017, the position of Director of the Division of Housing and Integration, informally known as JeffCo's homelessness liaison, has reported directly to the Director of HHS. With other newly created positions reporting to it, HHS is deciding where to best place the positions for the greatest impact.

At the same time, Jefferson County Heading Home, an informal collaborative of governments, housing authorities, faith-based communities, businesses, and non-profits, is seeking funding to hire a Heading Home Coordinator to maximize and support the various identified needs to address homelessness in the County. The Jefferson County municipal workgroup on homelessness is holding conversations about what local governmental support for this position might look like, based on a presentation given to municipal staff by one of the Heading Home Co-Chairs earlier this year.

WESTMINSTER UPDATES

Kate Skarbek, the City's homeless liaison, worked with Community and Outreach Division Staff, creating webpages about homelessness in mid-June 2018. The pages include information about the scope of homelessness, where to go for help, how to be part of the solution, how to participate in regional collaboration and what the City is doing to address homelessness is available at: <https://www.cityofwestminster.us/Residents/AssistancePrograms/HousingAssistance/HomelessnessResourcesandInformation>. These pages are in response to citizen questions and input at various community meetings, including the April and September 2018 Town Hall meetings. It is updated at least once a month.

Increasingly the webpages and Staff throughout the City are referring people to United Way 211 as a replacement for the previously produced Westminster Resource Guide. While the Resource Guide was useful, between the most recent update in January 2018 and the end of March, sixteen (16) revisions were needed because of the ever-changing landscape of service providers. Staff looked for more sustainable solutions.

As a result of a meeting between the City's homeless position and community outreach coordinator with Mile High United Way, an informal partnership formed in the late spring. United Way shared all of the entries in their database of service providers who include Westminster in their service area. City Staff then went through that list to determine if there were service providers Staff were aware of that were not included or accurately listed in the database. City Staff shared the list of organizations with Mile High United Way who then researched the providers to be certain the information was accurate before adding it to the database. United Way provided the City with more than 1,000 United Way 211 business cards that have been distributed in Recreation Centers, libraries and the Municipal Court.

United Way 211 phone, text and chat lines are staffed from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday every week by knowledgeable case workers who search the database Mile High United Way maintains of service providers throughout the region. During the severe weather months of

October through April, United Way staff call every shelter in the seven county region every morning to see about available shelter beds. They again do the same in the afternoon. After 5 p.m. and on weekends, calling 211 accesses a phone tree for shelters and other critical services. The shelter phone tree is based on the best possibilities for single women, single men and families available that night.

The City's homeless liaison works to ensure the regional discussions continue to move forward by attending meetings of those already working on issues surrounding homelessness, sometimes convening and facilitating the meetings. Staff regularly participates in discussions with municipal workgroups focusing on homeless issues in both counties. Staff also presents at meetings of organizations beginning to realize they are seeing an increase in homelessness throughout the region. In 2018, staff served on a panel discussion about housing and homelessness to Adams County health care providers, presented about magnet events at both the MDHI PIT launch and the Jefferson County PIT launch, spoken to the Adams and Jefferson County Commissioners about Housing First, presented to faith-based organizations in Westminster, and the Colorado Public Risk and Insurance Management Association. Staff also presented to several internal workgroups across the City to help answer other Staff questions about what role they can play in addressing homelessness.

VALUES AND ACTION ITEMS IDENTIFIED BY WESTMINSTER

There have been two City planning documents directly addressing homelessness.

"Every Westminster resident should have a safe, stable, and affordable place to live."
~City of Westminster Affordable & Workforce Housing Strategic Plan core value
(Oct. 2017)

In addition to the above value touching upon homelessness, the City's Strategic Plan Goal of Vibrant, Inclusive, and Engaged Community has the objective to "develop programs and strategies that build a unique sense of community in Westminster" with the following action item to support it:

Research and pursue strategies for addressing homelessness including cooperation with other governments, non-profits, and grant opportunities.
~City of Westminster 2017 Strategic Plan Action Item

REGIONALISM AND BEST PRACTICES

With regionalism in mind and according to their website, the MDHI, the Continuum of Care for the seven-county Denver region focuses upon:

“Communities that are reducing homelessness have a clear Housing First orientation. In a nutshell, Housing First means that all of Metro Denver's efforts are focused on finding suitable housing options for everyone experiencing homelessness with little to no preconditions. People are not screened out of housing because of lack of income, inability to remain sober, lack of compliance with medication, or histories of justice involvement.

Studies show that Housing First works even for people with the most complex health and behavioral needs and for those who have had very little success in more traditional housing programs. Housing First leads to better housing retention rates and better health outcomes. It's controversial but it works.”

The Housing First model is considered to be the best evidence-based practice among most homeless service providers in the United States, Europe, and other countries across the globe. The housing must come with the opportunity to benefit from wrap-around services such as physical and mental health, education, financial counseling, substance treatment, employment coaching and other services an individual or family might need. The ideal outcome is self-sustainability.

A single affordable housing unit costs an average of \$250,000 to build in the United States, according to several developers. Working out the financial package can take years for each site. In a tight housing market, such as the Denver region, bridge options are needed. Emergency or bridge services should work towards providing housing as quickly as possible. A timeframe of weeks would be ideal, but in a tight housing market several months or more may be necessary.

Ultimately, preventing homelessness from occurring will cost less than helping people and families transition into and then, hopefully, out of homelessness. These strategies are known as diversion or homeless prevention. Rental assistance, first and last month payment programs, down payment assistance, one-time emergency financial assistance, and legal assistance are all forms of homeless prevention. Diversion is finding a safe place for people to stay with friends or family while mitigating conflict. The approved 2019 and 2020 budget for the City includes funding requests for these types of preventative programs while the Colorado Legal Services collaborative aimed at preventing evictions in Adams County is already underway.

Unfortunately, housing is, by its very nature, expensive. The cost of not having housing is immense and immeasurable, both to individuals and communities. A housing or homelessness crisis resolution system can mitigate the individual and community harm by identifying what solutions are needed to connect people to housing sooner rather than later and, even better, to prevent homelessness from occurring in the first place.

According to the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH):

“Shelters, street outreach, and other crisis services are the front line of any community’s response to homelessness. They can help people meet basic survival needs like shelter, food, clothing, and personal hygiene. But homelessness is only truly ended when people obtain and maintain stable housing.

The Solution

Communities must shift from a set of services that simply address the immediate crisis of homelessness to a crisis response system that can help prevent and resolve homelessness by connecting people swiftly to permanent housing opportunities. An effective crisis response:

- **Identifies** all people experiencing or at risk of experiencing homelessness across the community;
- **Prevents** homelessness whenever possible;
- **Provides** immediate access **through coordinated entry** to shelter and crisis services without barriers to entry, as stable housing and supports are being secured; and
- Quickly **connects** people who experience homelessness to **housing assistance and/or services** tailored to the unique strengths and needs of households and which enable them to achieve and maintain permanent housing.

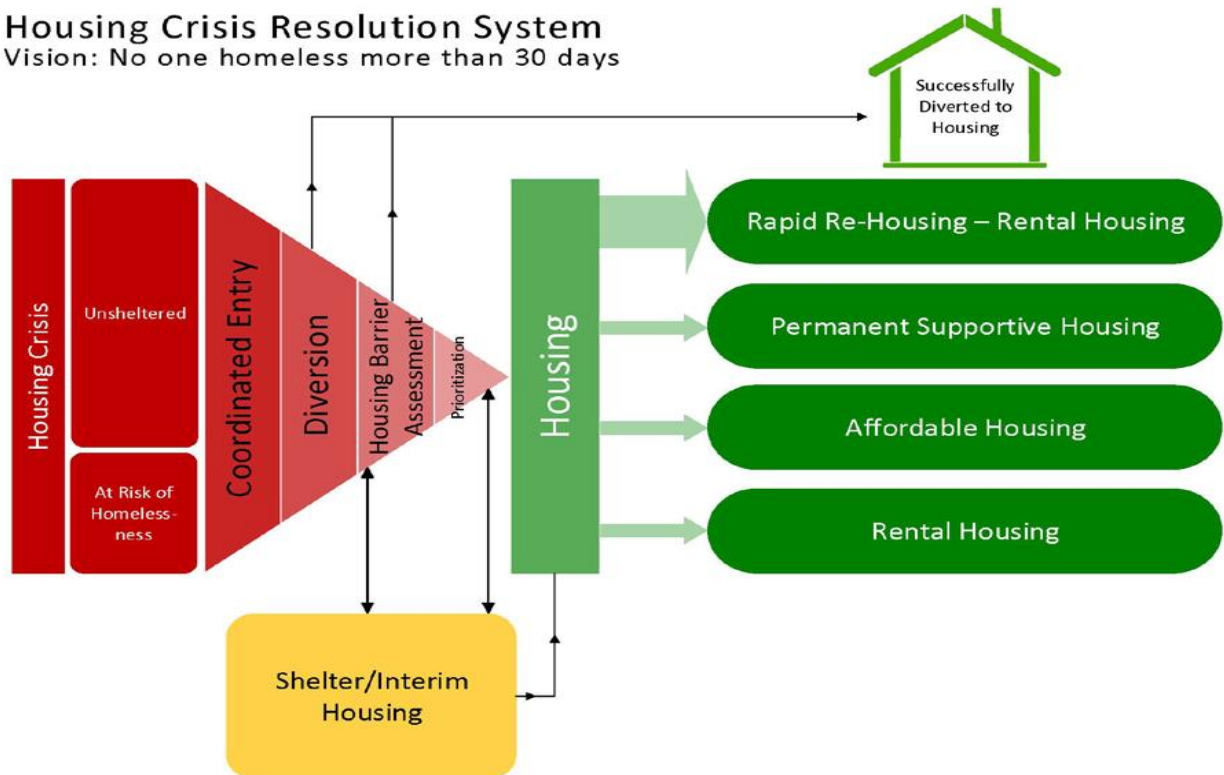
Services may include access to school or early childhood care and learning, public benefit programs, employment services, reunification services, and/or health care, including substance use and mental health services. For survivors fleeing domestic violence, specialized shelters and services should also be available.”

The Metro Denver Homeless Initiative is in the process of migrating from their old Homeless Management Information Software to a new vendor for a coordinated entry system that will be statewide. The transition is officially occurring in mid-December with blackout periods before and after while testing is done to ensure data quality. During the blackout period, providers will be still providing services, they simply will not be able to instantly communicate what referral is being given to all other service providers. The data will be retroactively entered.

This overall housing solution is best shown in a diagram created by Focused Strategies, a California-based company with a vision to end homelessness by working with agencies across the United States:

Housing Crisis Resolution System

Vision: No one homeless more than 30 days



This graphic effectively showcases the approach the seven-county MDHI takes to address homelessness. As mentioned in the County Update section of this report, there are substantial shifts potentially lowering the number of shelter beds available in both Adams and Jefferson Counties. Therefore, the homelessness presentation to City Council planned for the first quarter of 2019 will focus on the policy questions related to Shelter and Interim Housing options mentioned in the yellow box. Future reports to City Council will focus more on the best practices surrounding housing, trauma-informed care, and harm-reduction as longer-term solutions for those who are chronically homeless.

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