HOMELESSNESS UPDATE SPRING 2019

April 15, 2019

ABSTRACT

Provides an update on regional initiatives surrounding homelessness and 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. In an attempt to provide background information and create a shared understanding of the work the City has conducted on homelessness, some of the information is the same as what was provided in the *Homeless Report to City Council* on December 3, 2018. Whenever possible, updated information is provided throughout this report.

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 was held on Monday, January 28, 2019. Westminster hosted its second annual Everyone Counts Event at the Swim and Fitness Center from 5 – 8 p.m. that night in order to bring people in from outside and connect them to services while encouraging them to participate in the national survey. 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. The 2019 event successfully connected people who attended to a wide variety of services including Hepatitis A and flu vaccinations, basic health checks, showers, a warm meal, and benefits from Adams County Human Services.

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.

In June 2018, 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:
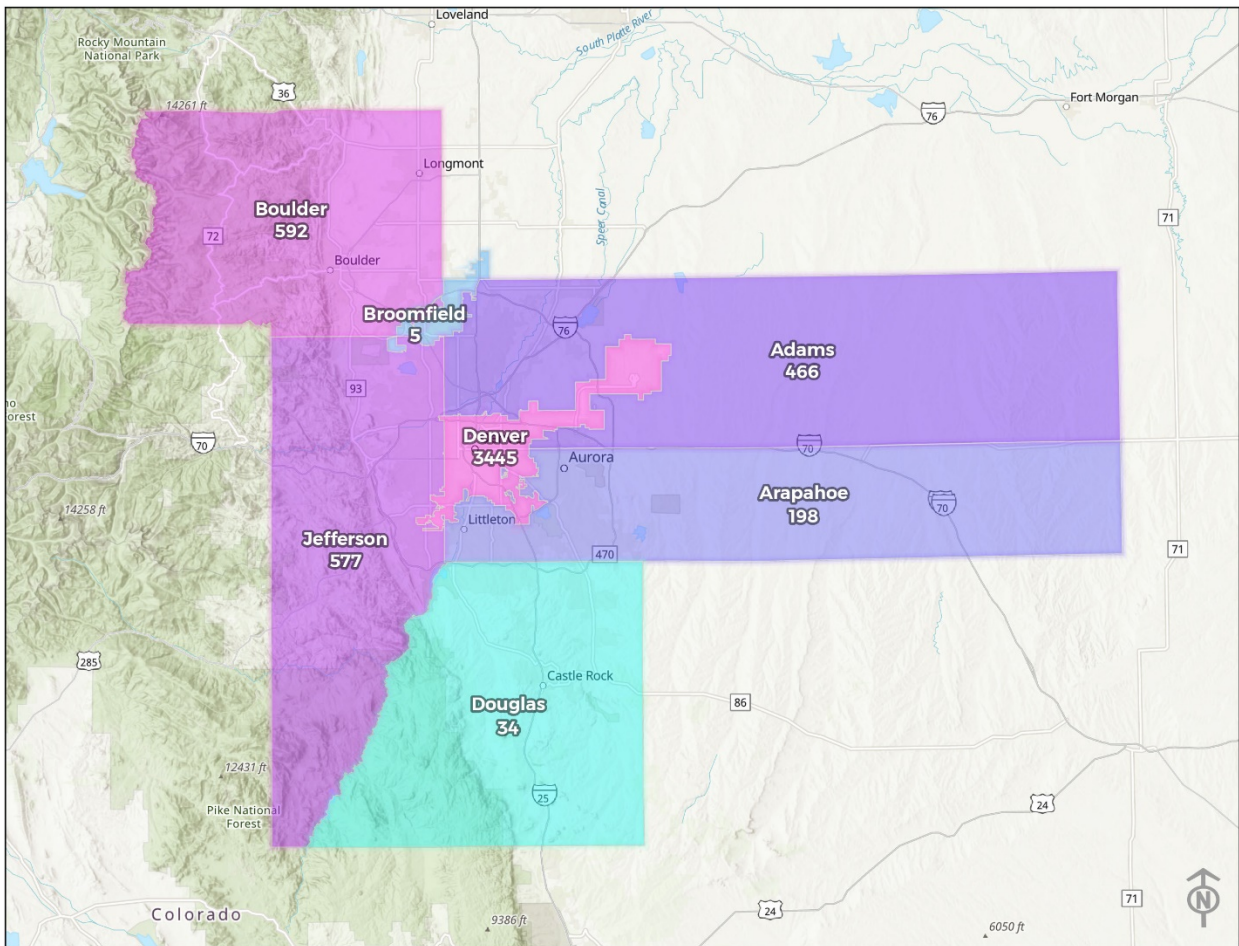
As discussed in the February 26, 2018 report to City Council on homelessness, the methodology of the Point in Time count presents many challenges. The chief obstacle is trying to locate and survey everyone who is living outdoors on a single night when the geographic area to be canvassed spans almost 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 likely contributed to this increase. 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.
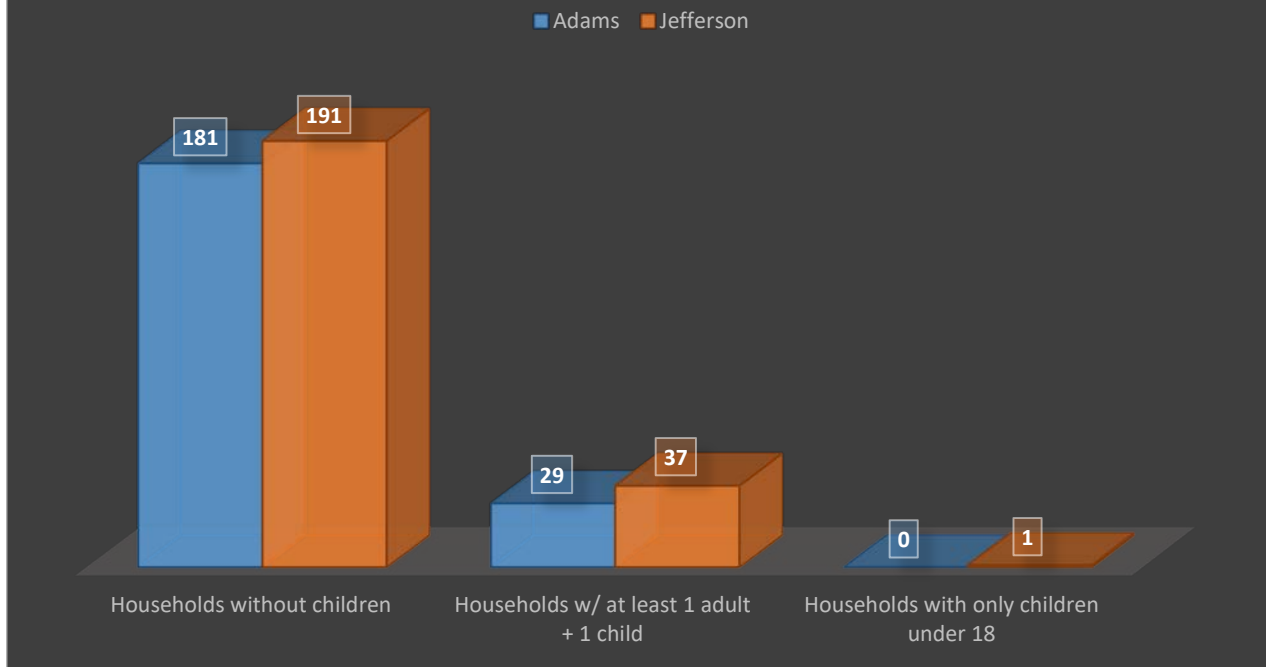
In Adams County, "over two-thirds (317 or 68.0%) of those surveyed during the count were single individuals. The majority of these single individuals, 57.1%, stayed in an unsheltered location. Almost four-fifths of families (79.2%) stayed in emergency shelters" (MDHI AdCo Report, p. 3). Those families 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

Adams   Jefferson

Households without children: Adams 181, Jefferson 191
Households w/ at least 1 adult + 1 child: Adams 29, Jefferson 37
Households with only children under 18: Adams 0, Jefferson 1

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.

Where Homeless Veterans Stayed by County on Jan. 29, 2018

Category	Jefferson	Adams
UNSHELTERED	16	28
TRANSITIONAL SHELTER	11	0
EMERGENCY SHELTER	5	15

■ Jefferson ■ Adams
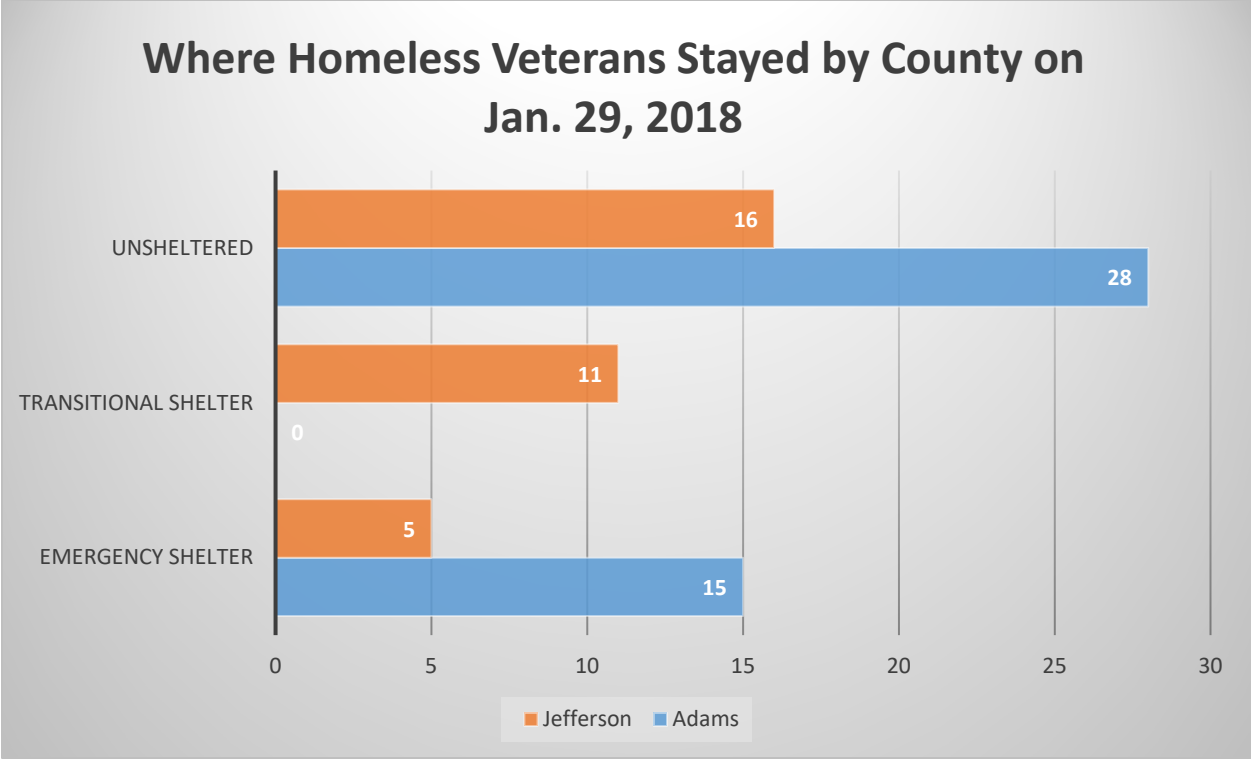
Nationally, veterans are one subpopulation of those who are homeless that show signs of improvement. "HUD's Annual Homeless Assessment Report (AHAR) finds the total number of reported veterans experiencing homelessness in 2018 decreased 5.4% since last year, falling to nearly half of the number of homeless 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
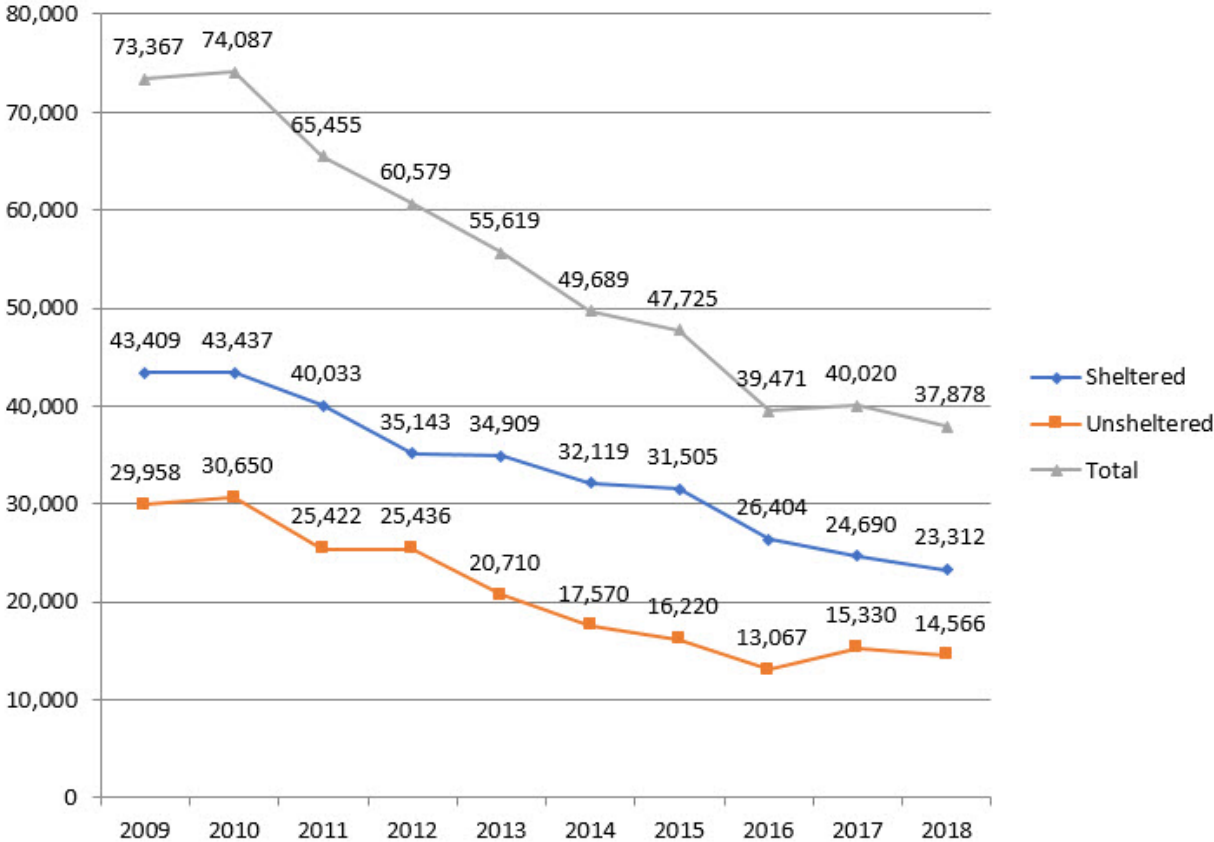
Source: HUD Newsletter.

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 to enter housing 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.

Where Families Without Homes Stayed, 2018
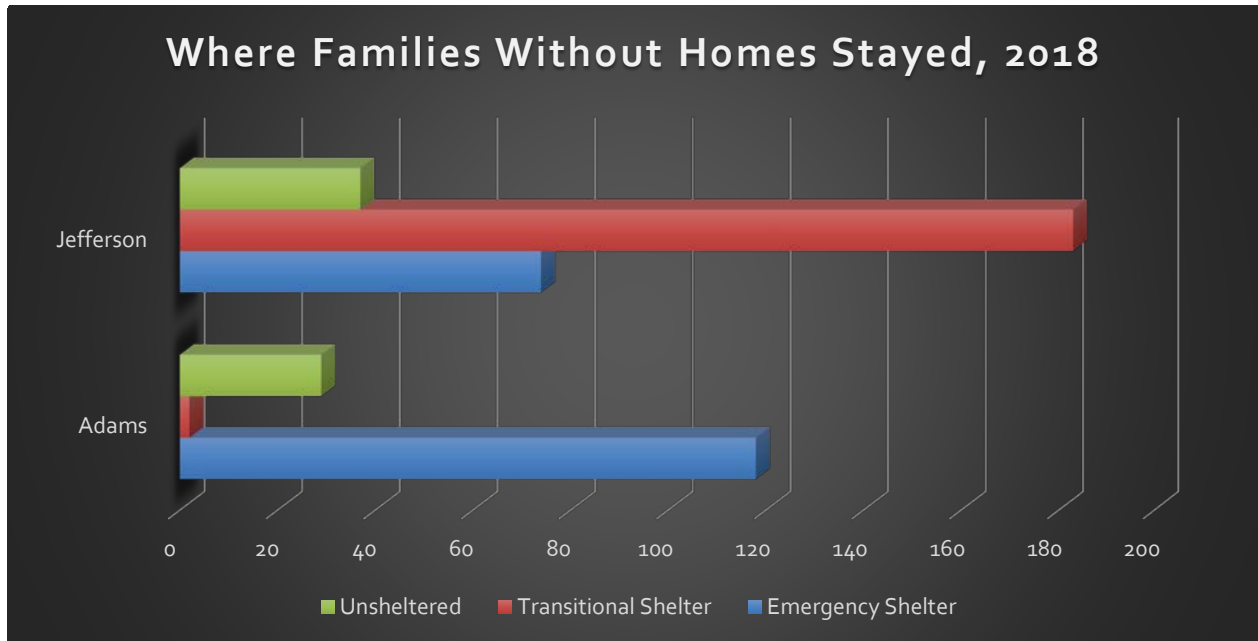
COLORADO COMPARED TO THE REST OF THE NATION

The 2018 United States Annual Homeless Assessment Report (AHAR) to Congress was released in mid-December 2018. The report said that the nationwide 2018 Point-in-Time survey identified 552,830 homeless individuals on that particular night. The 0.3% increase of 1,834 people over the 2017 count were in the unsheltered population.

The 2018 AHAR also showed two notable statewide trends in Colorado compared to other states. Colorado ranked within the top five in two different categories:

Colorado has the third largest percentage of homeless families with children who are unsheltered, living in a car, outdoors, or in another area not intended for human habitation compared to the rest of the nation:

- Oregon 54%
- Tennessee 33%
- Colorado 32%
- Wyoming 31%
- Idaho 28%

The national average of families who are homeless and unsheltered comes in slightly below 10% of the total homeless population.

Colorado also ranked third place of all the states with the largest increase over 2017 in the number of chronically homeless:

- Washington 32.5% with an additional 1,418 people
- Oregon 28.6% with an additional 893 people
- Colorado 20.9% with an additional 445 people
- Arizona 18.9% with an additional 277 people
- New York 14.6% with an additional 742 people

A chronically homeless individual or family has a head of household who has been living outdoors, in a shelter or area not intended for human habitation for at least a year or on at least four separate occasions in the last three years. To be chronically homeless, the person must also have a diagnosable substance abuse disorder, serious mental health illness, developmental disability, post-traumatic stress disorder, cognitive impairments resulting from a brain injury, or a chronic physical illness or disability.

THE 2019 POINT-IN-TIME SURVEY

The 2019 Point-in-Time count was conducted from sundown on Monday, January 28 to sundown on Tuesday, January 29, 2019. Once again, Westminster held an Everyone Counts magnet event at the Swim and Fitness Center. Unfortunately, 11.5 inches of snow fell in Westminster the day of the event, resulting in only 12 people attending. However, all 12 participated in the survey. They each had the opportunity to take a shower, eat a warm meal, choose from a wide variety of donated items, meet with Adams County Human Services staff to receive benefits, meet with Colorado Legal Services, Community Reach Center or receive Hepatitis A and flu vaccinations from Tri-County Health Department. Denver metro area results will be available in June 2019 and national results in December.

SCHOOL CHILDREN WHO ARE WITHOUT HOMES

The number of pre-Kindergarten (pre-K) through twelfth grade students meeting the Department of Education's definition of homelessness was released in March 2019 for the 2017-18 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 definition of homeless with a total of 3,841 (an increase of 233) over the previous school year. Jefferson County places second in the state with 3,058 (also an increase of 233). A look at the seven Adams County school districts by type of homelessness:

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District Name	Shelters, transitional housing, awaiting foster care	Doubled-up because of economic hardship	Unsheltered	Hotels or Motels	Total
Mapleton 1	6	148	8	18	180
Adams 12	93	1,694	22	76	1,885
Adams 14	20	463	6	32	521
Brighton 27J	58	208	5	8	279
Bennett 29J	0	35	0	0	35
Strasburg 31J	0	29	0	0	29
Westminster	10	873	2	27	912
Adams Total	**187**	**3,450**	**43**	**161**	**3,841**

The two counties account for 28.59% of Colorado's 24,127 homeless pre-K through twelfth grade students. During the 2017-18 school year, Colorado counted a total of 910,280 pre-K through twelfth grade students with just over 2.6% of them qualifying as homeless – an increase of .2% over the previous year.

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
Adams 12	93	1,694	22	76	1,885
Jefferson	233	2,468	87	270	3,058
Westminster	10	873	2	27	912
Totals	**336**	**5,035**	**111**	**373**	**5,855**

Of particular note, the number of Adams 12 homeless students increased by 422 over the previous academic year while Westminster Public Schools decreased by 218. The Westminster Public Schools homeless liaison reports that the decrease there is largely due to displacement with many families no longer able to afford to stay in the area.

DENVER METRO WIDE UPDATES

In December 2018, the Metro Denver Homeless Initiative migrated from one Homeless Management Information Software to a new one, known as Clarity. The original software did not easily facilitate agencies working together. Data entry was time-consuming and restrictive as to who at each agency could input information. Consequently, backlogs of data entry occurred on a regular basis, making it all but impossible to be assured about what services had been offered to any one individual or family. At the same time, report generation never worked the way it was promised by the software company.

From mid-December 2018 to early January 2019, the migration took place, while data quality was tested and re-tested. As information about what referrals were being made to clients are entered in real time into the database, services are becoming more streamlined. In the first three months of the new software, homeless service agencies across the region are reporting high levels of satisfaction with the new system and processes. Trainings continue to be provided by MDHI for free, allowing more and more staff to input and access information to better serve clients. Over time, this software will make it possible to extract reports from shelters on the night of the Point in Time so volunteers will not need to be deployed to count those staying in shelters that night. Instead, the more than 500 volunteers the Point-in-Time (PIT) regularly relies on will be able to conduct street outreach and assist with magnet events to better connect with those living outdoors instead of those already connecting to services.

ADAMS AND JEFFERSON COUNTY UPDATES

This remains a time of great transition in both counties surrounding homelessness.

In February, Colorado Legal Services started providing free legal help for qualifying low-income tenants across Adams County and the City and County of Broomfield. The legal aid is paid for by contributions from Adams County, the City of Aurora, the City of Brighton, the City and County of Broomfield, Commerce City, Federal Heights, the City of Northglenn, the City of Thornton and the City of Westminster. With Adams County having the highest eviction rate in Colorado, the legal services can help reverse or mitigate the effects of eviction proceedings. This is a form of homeless prevention. Legal assistance is available on a walk-in basis at the Adams County Justice Center and by appointment at the Irving Street Library by calling 720-595-4379. Information about the program is available on the City website, the City's Economic Development webpages and as flyers and posters in the five Recreation Centers, the Municipal Court, both libraries and other City facilities. While the City partnered with Adams County jurisdictions, it is important to note that the services are available to all Westminster residents, including those living in Jefferson County.

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 2018. 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 the County continued to meet on a monthly basis, with the various

municipalities alternating hosting responsibilities. Those meetings have resumed after a brief hiatus around the holidays.

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.

Adams County is partnering with Bayaud Enterprises to pilot a workforce program, currently informally referred to as Adams County Works for people experiencing homelessness. The program will provide low to no barrier employment opportunity and same-day cash, as well as employment services and resource navigation. The county is proposing to the Board of County Commissioners that a pilot program launch in mid-June or early July 2019.

Adams County staff are also planning on a tiny home site in unincorporated Adams County, although they are still in the initial phase of the planning process.

The Adams County Coalition for the Homeless (ACCH), an informal collaborative of non-profits, faith-based organizations and governmental agencies, is transitioning from monthly meetings to every other month meetings to accommodate action-focused workgroups from meeting on a more frequent basis. Each workgroup will focus on a specific initiative: day shelter, street outreach, youth, resources and funding. The initiatives were identified at a recent meeting of the ACCH. The Westminster homeless Staff person remains on the steering committee supporting these initiatives. The ACCH meetings are hosted by the City of Westminster at the MAC.

Both counties have seen a decrease in shelter bed availability for a variety of reasons that will be outlined in a May 2019 City Council Study Session. At that time, Westminster's role in addressing the shortfall will be examined.

In Jefferson County, discussions have focused on the creation of a county-wide homeless coordinator with navigators to assist in supporting those seeking services to prevent or transition out of homelessness. These discussions are more thoroughly covered in the Information Only Jefferson County Regional Proposal Regarding Homelessness Report in this same packet.

Additionally, work is underway to conduct a Jefferson County-wide comprehensive homeless count in August 2019. Not only will those meeting the HUD-definition of homelessness be counted but so will those who live in a hotel but do not have enough funding to stay for more than 14 days, are "couch surfing" and/or doubled up for financial reasons. These are the other types of homelessness that meet the definition of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services or the Department of Education acknowledge.

Led by a steering committee comprised of staff members from Arvada, the county, Lakewood and Westminster, Wheat Ridge and Golden will also contribute funding to hire a firm for data analysis. The City of Arvada is acting as the fiscal agent, having provided the other jurisdictions the opportunity to weigh in on the bids received.

Non-profit agencies, the school district, healthcare providers, all jurisdictions in the county have agreed to participate by either conducting the survey for the week it is officially open or share their non-personally identifiable data showing how many non-duplicated clients they served during the month of August who met one of these more comprehensive definitions of homelessness.

The idea is to identify the full scope of homelessness in a traditionally suburban county. This is expected to be valuable information as conversations around sheltering options get seriously underway across the county. This topic continues to rise to the forefront of service discussions in Jefferson County, especially in the wake of the closing of The Action Center shelter in June 2018 and the Family Cold Weather Shelter not finding a way to open during the current cold weather season. It is impossible to successfully plan for services, shelter or otherwise, if there is little understanding of the full scope of homelessness and those who are unstably housed in the county.

WESTMINSTER'S APPROACH TO HOMELESSNESS SINCE 2016

COMMUNICATION AND RESOURCE GUIDES

In 2017, the Westy Live Better webpages at https://www.cityofwestminster.us/LiveBetter were created by the Community and Outreach Division and Kate Skarbek, the City's Homeless Liaison. Designed to be a one-stop shop place for residents to find every low- and no-cost service the City either directly provides, including by formal agreement with a partner agency, it is intended to be an easy way for residents and the non-profits who serve them to navigate support systems when needed. Assistance for water billing, food, home repairs, safety and more can be found in one convenient location in both English and Spanish.

The same team created 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/Homeless nessResourcesandInformation. 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 three months later at the end of March, 16revisions 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 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

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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.

Internally, a Homeless Task Force representing most departments and offices in the City was reformed in mid-2017 and continues to evolve as needs arise. This team ensures discussions are taking place about issues surrounding homelessness across the City organization. The various departments identify trends by reporting out to other departments as they start to happen in the City. With point people in each department, Staff members throughout the organization have someone they are likely to regularly interact with to report various situations that need to be addressed and learn of resources that might be available to assist. The City's homeless liaison coordinates the meetings and facilitates internal discussions while providing educational opportunities for interested Staff members.

REGIONAL COLLABORATION

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. She regularly participates in discussions with municipal workgroups focusing on homeless issues in both counties. She regularly interacts with representatives of more than 100 homeless service organizations, other jurisdictions, or faith-based community members. In April 2019, she will begin serving on the MDHI Notification of Financial Award (NOFA) Committee. This will provide her with direct insight into what the Continuum of Care and HUD look for to determine funding eligibility in the region and nationally.

She also presents at meetings of organizations beginning to realize they are seeing an increase in homelessness throughout the region. In 2018, she has 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. She has also presented to several internal workgroups across the City to help answer Staff questions about what role they can play in addressing homelessness.

PROGRAMMING AND SERVICES PROVIDED

As mentioned earlier, the PIT Everyone Counts magnet events provide a wide variety of services from partner agencies. In 2019, the Westminster Everyone Counts Event hosted the following service providers to directly offer services to community members who are homeless: Adams County Human Services, the City of Westminster Recreation Division, Colorado Legal Services, Community Reach Center, The Gourmet Kitchen, Tri-County Health Department, Red Rocks Community College Nursing and Medical Students, and various hairstylists provided free haircuts.

In December 2017, the City began providing hotel stays when shelters are full and police find someone on an extremely cold night.

Throughout 2017 and most of 2018, MDHI's One Home provided someone who had experienced homelessness to visit the Irving Street Library one afternoon a month to conduct the Vulnerability Index Survey to determine who would qualify for housing. Recently, Staff in the Library Division arranged for a shower truck to visit one morning a week and a laundry truck to visit once a month when temperatures are warm enough to operate the plumbing lines. This was done in order to remove the barriers to employment most people who are homeless said they experience, instead spending their time at the library when not getting a day job.

To address food insecurity in the area, partial funds from the Invest Health grant provided by Reinvestment Fund and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation were given to the food banks to share a van to reduce the waste of fresh food. This same grant was used to assist with the transportation and literacy needs of homeless students attending Westminster Public Schools.

The City's Human Services Board focused on funding service agencies that provide housing, shelter, or food in 2018 and 2019. They are currently determining what their funding focus will be for 2020.

PREVENTION

In addition to the free legal services for tenant program previously mentioned , the City has:

- Concentrated on preserving existing affordable housing
- Initiated building new workforce housing
- Hired a housing coordinator
- Assigned $5.9 million received from the State of Colorado to a low-interest mortgage and down payment assistance program operated by the Colorado Housing Finance Authority for Westminster residents to access as needed

All of these efforts to prevent and address homelessness stemmed from planning documents created in the last several years by the City.

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 U.S., 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 U.S., 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.

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.

REGIONAL HOUSING CRISIS RESOLUTION SYSTEM

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:
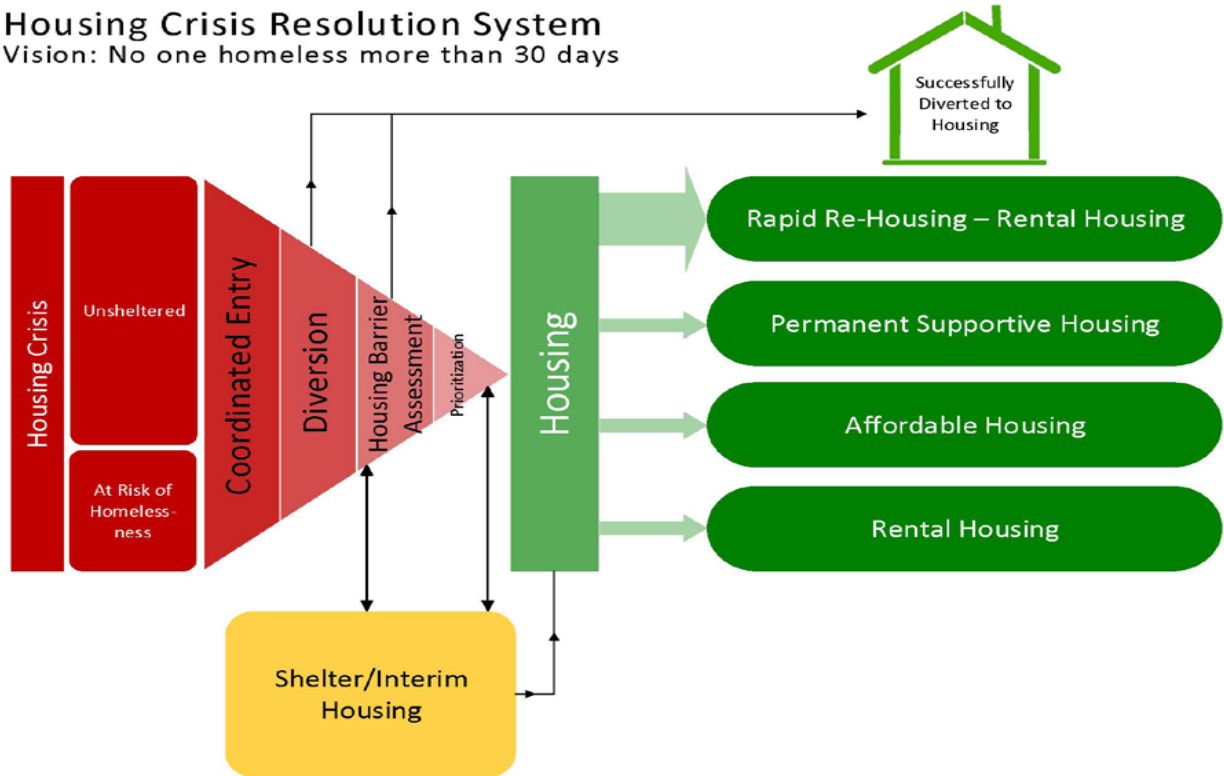
> - **Identifies** all people experiencing or at risk of experiencing homelessness across the community;

> - **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 MDHI 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 occurred in mid-December 2018 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 U.S.:

Housing Crisis Resolution System
Vision: No one homeless more than 30 days

Housing Crisis
- Unsheltered
- At Risk of Homelessness

Coordinated Entry
Diversion
Housing Barrier Assessment
Prioritization

Housing

Successfully Diverted to Housing

Rapid Re-Housing – Rental Housing
Permanent Supportive Housing
Affordable Housing
Rental Housing

Shelter/Interim Housing

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 next homelessness presentation tentatively scheduled for May 2019 to City Council 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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