



Snohomish County
Office of the Executive
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Snohomish County's homeless numbers down *Officials looking for trends among data collected since 2005*

Early results in the annual Point in Time homeless count show a potential drop in the number of people in Snohomish County without a permanent place to stay.

During last week's count, more than 180 people spent part of a frigid evening gathering data on Snohomish County's homeless population. This year's total – still incomplete – was 1,819, compared to 2,666 in 2007.

Yet, county officials say they're reluctant to declare homelessness here in decline following three years of successive gains. During 2006, there were 2,626 people counted as homeless. The year before, about 2,500 people claimed they did not have a home.

“We need to look at how these numbers break down and who is most affected by homelessness in Snohomish County,” said County Executive Aaron Reardon. “That will help us determine the best way to find permanent homes for those in need.”

Numbers for 2008 initially can be divided into two categories. Those staying in shelters and transitional housing the night of the count totaled 987. Another 832 were without a place to stay. Of those, 87 were children.

A count of the Snohomish County Jail – separate from the above total – indicated as many as 436 additional inmates would have no place to go when released, an increase over last year's 350.

County staff will spend the next two months closely studying data from the Point in Time count, comparing numbers and demographics collected during past years while looking for trends.

Specifically, the county is reviewing additional information related to a person's disability status, the number of episodes of homelessness and the duration.

“We're analyzing the data so that we can chart the causes of homelessness and the needs of the homeless,” said Sola Plumacher, Snohomish County's lead coordinator for the Point in Time count.

Statistics gathered also will help the county determine how different populations are affected by homelessness, including single mothers with children, those with mental-

health issues and veterans. At least 263 people counted last week claimed they had served in the Armed Forces.

The large difference between 2007 and 2008 numbers likely is the result of several reasons, county officials say. This year's count was conducted during a smaller time period than last year, and extremely cold weather made it more difficult to collect an accurate number.

Totals are expected to increase slightly in the coming weeks as individual agencies that helped collect numbers finish reporting their results.

The Point in Time count is a state and federal requirement, but it also helps Snohomish County create policy and programs to assist those who are homeless.

County Executive Reardon has made affordable housing one of his top agenda items for the new term. He has said that affordable housing and homelessness must be tackled together.

During the past three years, more than 1,000 new units of affordable housing have been constructed, but that hasn't been enough to keep up with demand.

Earlier this month, Reardon convened the county's Housing & Homelessness Policy Oversight Committee, which will suggest how best to establish benchmarks for homeless and housing initiatives as well as guide long-term strategies.

"The goal is to find permanent solutions for ending homelessness, but that means searching for innovative ideas," Reardon said. "The oversight committee will be a valuable tool in generating new proposals that can then be turned into action."

The oversight committee will review the Point in Time results during its next meeting.

In 2006, the county approved the "Everyone At Home Now" report, a strategy for ending homelessness here by 2016. The plan calls for the expansion of homeless housing coupled with support services and for the development of programs geared toward specific groups.

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