

# Community Fact Sheet

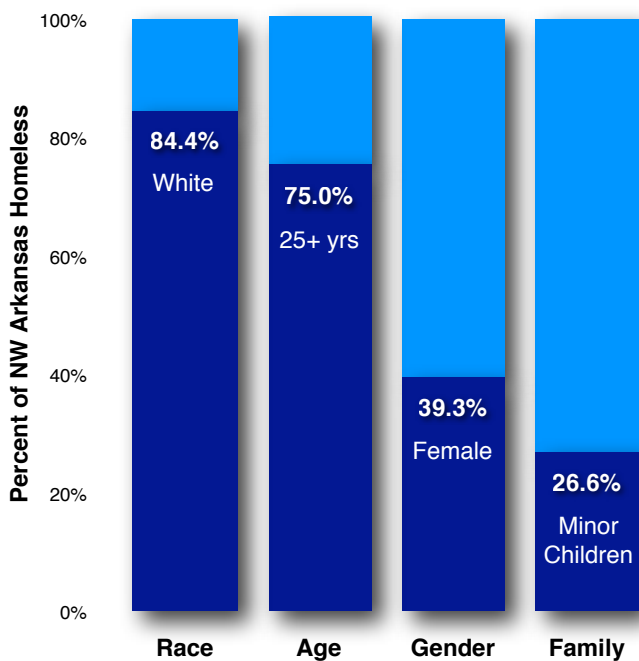
University of Arkansas Community and Family Institute

## With and Without Their Own Place: Homelessness and Housing in NW Arkansas

by Kevin M. Fitzpatrick, Ph.D. and Brad A. Myrstol, Ph.D.

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**Figure 1. Personal and Family Characteristics Homeless Persons, Northwest Arkansas (n=308)**



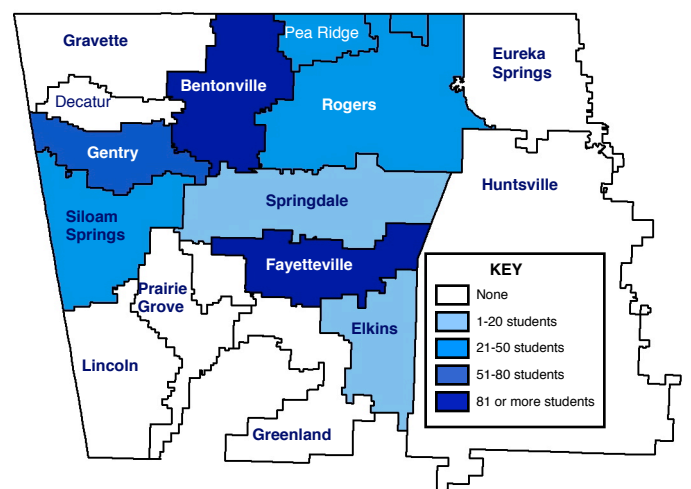
Source: Fitzpatrick, K., Miller, E., and K. Gross. (2007). Northwest Arkansas Point-in-Time (PIT) Survey of Homeless Persons, January 25-26, 2007. Fayetteville, AR.

How many and who are they? Recently published results from the 2007 Northwest Arkansas Point-in-Time (PIT) census reveal that on any given night, approximately 1,170 adults and youth are homeless in the Northwest Arkansas area. A brief demographic profile of homeless adults in NW Arkansas is presented in Figure 1. Homeless persons 18 years and older are typically White, middle-aged men who are either unmarried, or married without children. Notably, however, a significant segment of this sub-population are women (39.3%), the majority of whom (78%) are the parent or guardian of minor children. Compared to the nation as a whole, the homeless in NW Arkansas are older and less likely to be a racial minority.

Perhaps the most significant and telling finding of the census is that nearly 50 percent of all of the homeless in NW Arkansas are less than 18 years of age. Figure 2 shows the distribution of children enrolled in Washington County and Benton County school districts who are “doubling up” with friends or relatives. While a few school districts report no homeless student enrollments, others enroll a large number. Bentonville schools enroll 106 students who rely on friends or relatives for shelter, and the Fayetteville school district enrolls 89. These children and their parents, who are often termed the “invisible homeless,” are of particular concern because they often do not think of themselves as homeless, and therefore do not have knowledge of or attempt to access services.

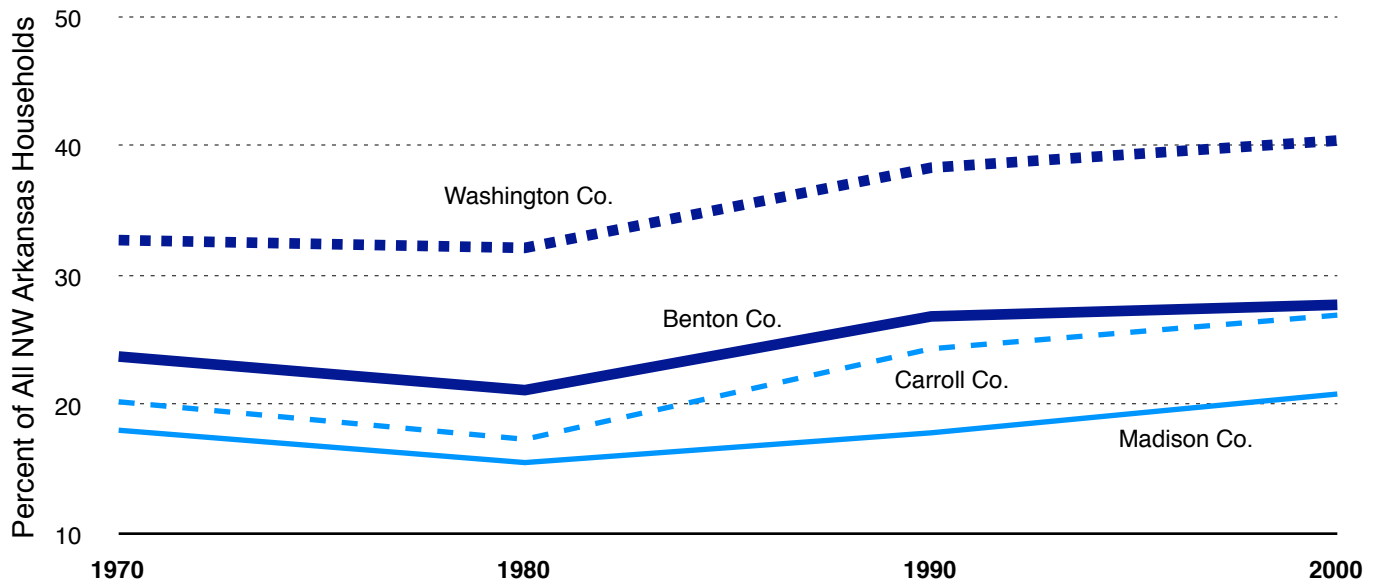
While some of the rural school districts do report moderate numbers, youth homelessness tends to be concentrated in the urban core of NW Arkansas region, along the I-540 corridor.

**Figure 2. Homeless Youth “Doubled Up” Living with Friends or Relatives, by School District**



Source: Fitzpatrick, K., Miller, E., and K. Gross. (2007). A Needs Assessment of the Homeless of Northwest Arkansas, 2007. Fayetteville, AR.

**Figure 3. Renter Households in Northwest Arkansas Counties: 1970 to 2000**



**Sources:** U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2000 General Housing Characteristics, Arkansas. Summary File 1. *U.S. Census of Population and Housing, 1990: Summary Population and Housing Characteristics: Arkansas.* U.S. Census of Housing, 1980: *Characteristics of Housing Units: General Housing Characteristics: Arkansas.* U.S. Census of Housing, 1970: *Housing Characteristics for States, Cities and Counties: Arkansas.*

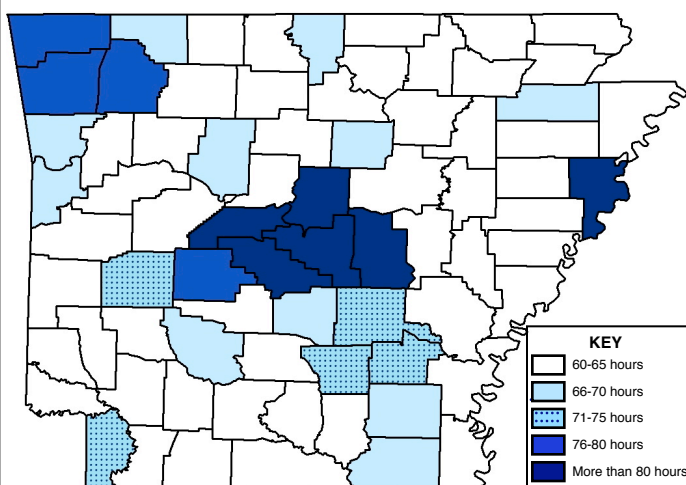
One of the most significant factors contributing to the problem of homelessness in the United States is access to affordable housing. Assuming that people would choose to own their own home if given the means and the opportunity to purchase, the percentage of households that are rented can be used as an indirect measure of housing affordability. Figure 3 shows that the the percentage of renter households has been increasing steadily in NW Arkansas, indicating, perhaps, an overall decline in housing affordability. In 1970, with the exception of Washington County, fewer than one-quarter of all

households in NW Arkansas were rented. By 2000, that number had increased to nearly 30 percent, with 41 percent of Washington County households, 28 percent of Benton County households, 27 percent of Carroll County households, and 21 percent of Madison County housing units classified as rentals. The national average for 2000 was 33 percent.

To measure housing affordability more directly, one can measure the percentage of a household's gross monthly income dedicated to the payment of rent. "Affordable" housing is defined as that requiring 30 percent or less of a household's gross income. In NW Arkansas, the mean annual wage for renters is \$10.50 per hour, roughly \$21,000 per year, while the Fair Market Rent (FMR) for a two-bedroom apartment in NW Arkansas is \$7,296 per year. Thus, the typical renter in NW Arkansas has to work a minimum of 46 hours per week in order to pay FMR for a two-bedroom apartment. A minimum wage worker would have to work in excess of 75 hours per week to afford the same (see Figure 4).

The challenge of finding affordable housing is clearly significant for minimum wage workers in the five central counties surrounding Little Rock, Arkansas. Nevertheless, these same workers in Northwest Arkansas counties (Benton, Madison, Washington) pay nearly \$300 more a year in FMR than the average renter in Arkansas in order to afford a two-bedroom apartment. The number of units and their fair market rent continues to plague rapidly expanding metropolitan regions like Northwest Arkansas.

**Figure 4. Arkansas Housing Affordability, by County**  
Hours Needed To Work for FMR, Minimum Wage Workers



**Source:** Pelletiere, D., Wardrip, K., and S. Crowley. (2008). *Out of Reach 2007-2008*. National Low Income Housing Coalition. Data available at: <http://www.nlihc.org/oor/oor2008/>