

Community Fact Sheet

Putting a Face on NWA's Homeless: More Results from the 2009 Homeless Census

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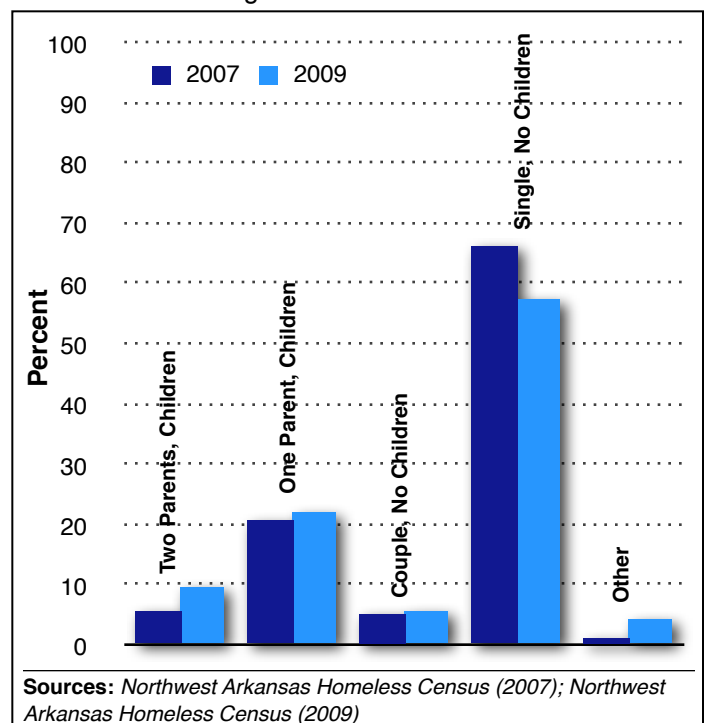
Who Are They?

On any given night, it is estimated that nearly 1,300 adults and youth are without their own place in Washington and Benton Counties. Results from the 2009 Northwest Arkansas Homeless Census (n=269) revealed that 63 percent were male, 83 percent were White/Caucasian, and 58 percent unmarried. The median age was 41 years. While this demographic profile mirrors much of what was reported in the 2007 Northwest Arkansas Homeless Census, there are some important shifts worth noting.

In both the 2007 and 2009 versions of the census, the majority of homeless persons were White/Caucasian. However, in 2009 there were twice as many Native Americans (5.9% versus 2.3%) and Hispanics (9.3% versus 4.5%) than in 2007. Homeless adults in 2009 were also significantly older (41 years versus 36 years). Perhaps the most

important shift was found in the living situation of adults. In 2007, 66 percent of those counted reported living on their own. That number dropped more than 10 percent in 2009 to 57 percent. Particularly important in the 2009 census was a 6 percent rise (from 26% to 32%) in the number of homeless adults who told interviewers they were either a single parent or a member of a two-parent family with children. In 2007, 59 youth under 18 were accompanying adult parents; by 2009 that number increased to 90 youth. As in the rest of the nation, women with children are one of the fastest growing segments of the homeless population in the region.

Figure 1. Current Family Situation
Benton and Washington Counties



Where Are They? For How Long?

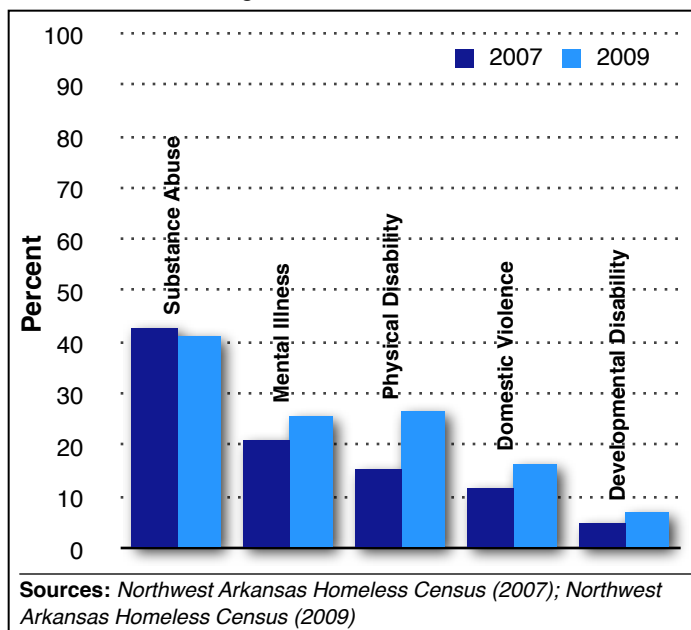
Nearly half of the homeless persons interviewed in 2009 (46%) were staying in either emergency or transitional shelters. Nearly one of every five individuals reported doubling-up with friends and relatives (18.2%), and more than one of every ten persons (11.2%) was living outdoors in camps, makeshift shelters, etc. Both of these percentages were higher than reported in the 2007 homeless census.

People are staying homeless for longer periods of time. The median time spent homeless in 2007 was 3 months. In 2009 that figure increased to 5 months. The percentage who were homeless for more than two years increased from 6 percent to 13 percent. In 2007, 52 percent of the homeless interviewed in 2007 said this was not the first time they were homeless. That percentage was similar in 2009.

What Are Their Challenges and Needs?

Of those homeless persons interviewed in 2009, 72 percent reported suffering from at least one of the disabling conditions listed in Figure 2. Except for substance abuse, all the categories saw increases between 2007 and 2009. These categories relate to HUD’s definition of the chronic homeless. In 2007, 21 percent met HUD’s definition. By 2009 the percentage of homeless reporting chronic/disabling conditions increased to 27 percent.

Figure 2. Self-Reported Disabling Conditions
Benton and Washington Counties



Despite the vigorous efforts of local agencies and organizations, there remains a sizable gap between the needs of the homeless and the services provided to them. Unfortunately, the services that are in short supply are also the ones best able to help people successfully transition out of homelessness. Figure 3 depicts the top five service needs reported by homeless in 2009. Topping the list are medical needs where 40 percent said they needed either medication or medical assistance or both. Both job training and transportation were listed as important to over one-third of those interviewed. Not surprising, more permanent solutions to housing were consistently needed by more than one-quarter of the population.

Figure 3. Top Five Service Needs Currently Not Receiving, 2009 Benton and Washington Counties

