

Community Fact Sheet

The Changing Face of NWA's Homeless: More Results from the 2011 Homeless Census

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Who Are They?

On any given night, it is estimated that over 2,000 adults and youth are without their own place in Washington and Benton Counties. Results from the 2011 Northwest Arkansas Homeless Census of interviewed adults (n=437), revealed that 58 percent were male, 81 percent were White/Caucasian, and 64 percent unmarried. The median age was 40 years. While this demographic profile mirrors much of what was reported in the 2009 Northwest Arkansas Homeless Census, there are some shifts that have taken place worth noting.

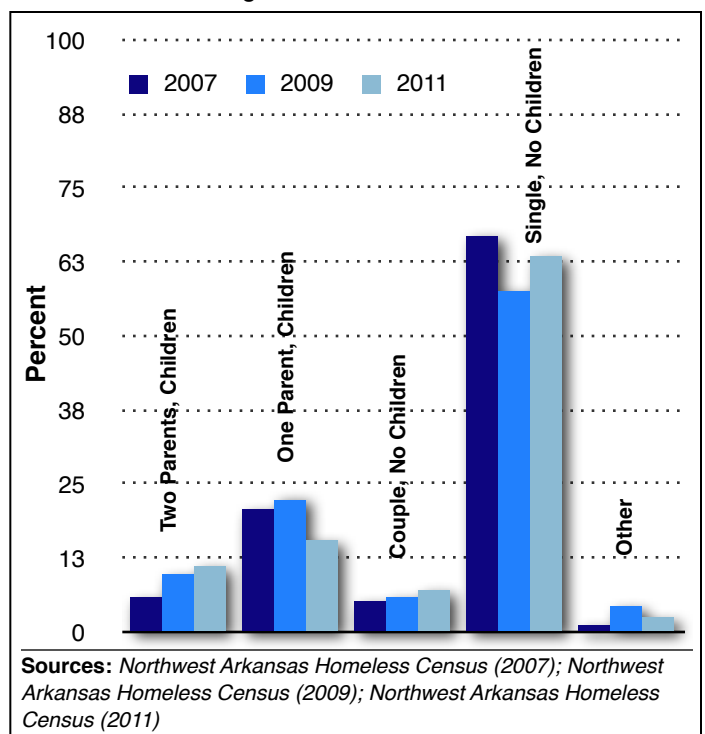
Perhaps the most important shift was found in the living situation of adults. In 2007, 66 percent of those counted reported living on their own. That number dropped by nearly 10 percent in 2009 (57%) and now has moved back up again to 64 percent in 2011.

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. That percentage dropped slightly in 2011 (27%) but still represented more than one-quarter of all the homeless adults that were interviewed.

In 2007, 59 youth under 18 were accompanying their adult parents; by 2009 that number increased to 90 youth and jumped to 112 (20% increase) in 2011. Similar to the rest of the nation, women with children are one of the fastest growing segments of the homeless population in Northwest Arkansas; more than 80 percent of adults who reported being a single parent were women.

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; that percentage has declined in 2011 to 31 percent. In 2009 18 percent of those interviewed reported doubling-up with friends and relatives and that percentage has increased (26%) in 2011. Clearly, the invisible homeless are increasing with the economic crisis profoundly impacting the American family.

People are staying homeless for longer periods of time. The median time spent homeless in 2007 was 3 months. In 2009 and 2011 the median time homeless was 5 months. In 2007, 52 percent of the homeless interviewed said this was not the first time they were homeless. That percentage was similar in 2009. However, in a dramatic shift, only 25 percent reported being homeless multiple times in the last three years. Nearly 75 percent of those interviewed were reporting being homeless for the first time.

What Are Their Challenges and Needs?

Of those homeless persons interviewed in 2011, 75 percent reported suffering from at least one of the disabling conditions listed in Figure 2. Except for domestic violence, all the categories saw increases between 2009 and 2011. These categories correspond to HUD's definition of what characterizes the chronic homeless. In 2007, 21 percent met HUD's definition, and by 2011, the percentage of

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

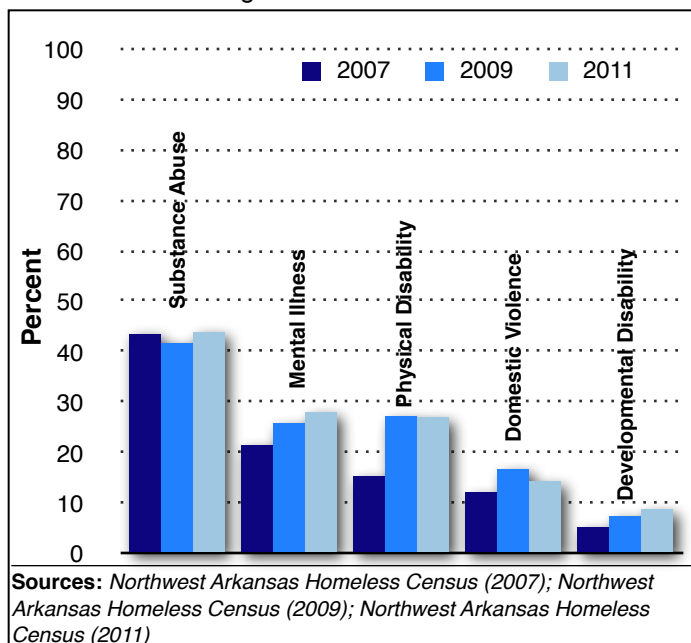
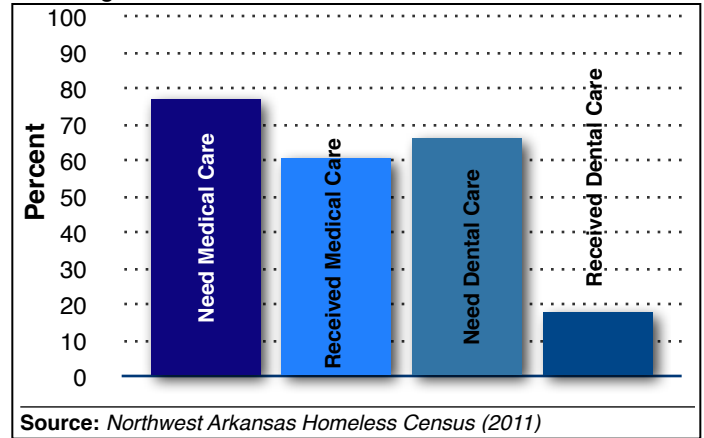


Figure 3. Self-Reported Care and Needs Benton and Washington Counties



homeless reporting chronic/disabling conditions increased to 27 percent.

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. The most serious service gap is found with dental care. Sixty-six percent reported needing dental care in the last year, yet less than 18 percent received it. A much smaller gap existed for primary medical care.

Unfortunately, the services in short supply are also the ones best able to help people successfully transition out of homelessness. Figure 4 depicts the top five service needs reported by homeless persons in 2011. While still considerable, these service needs are lower (percent who need the service) than those reported in 2009. Is the gap closing?

Figure 4. Top Five Service Needs Currently Not Receiving, 2011 Benton and Washington Counties

