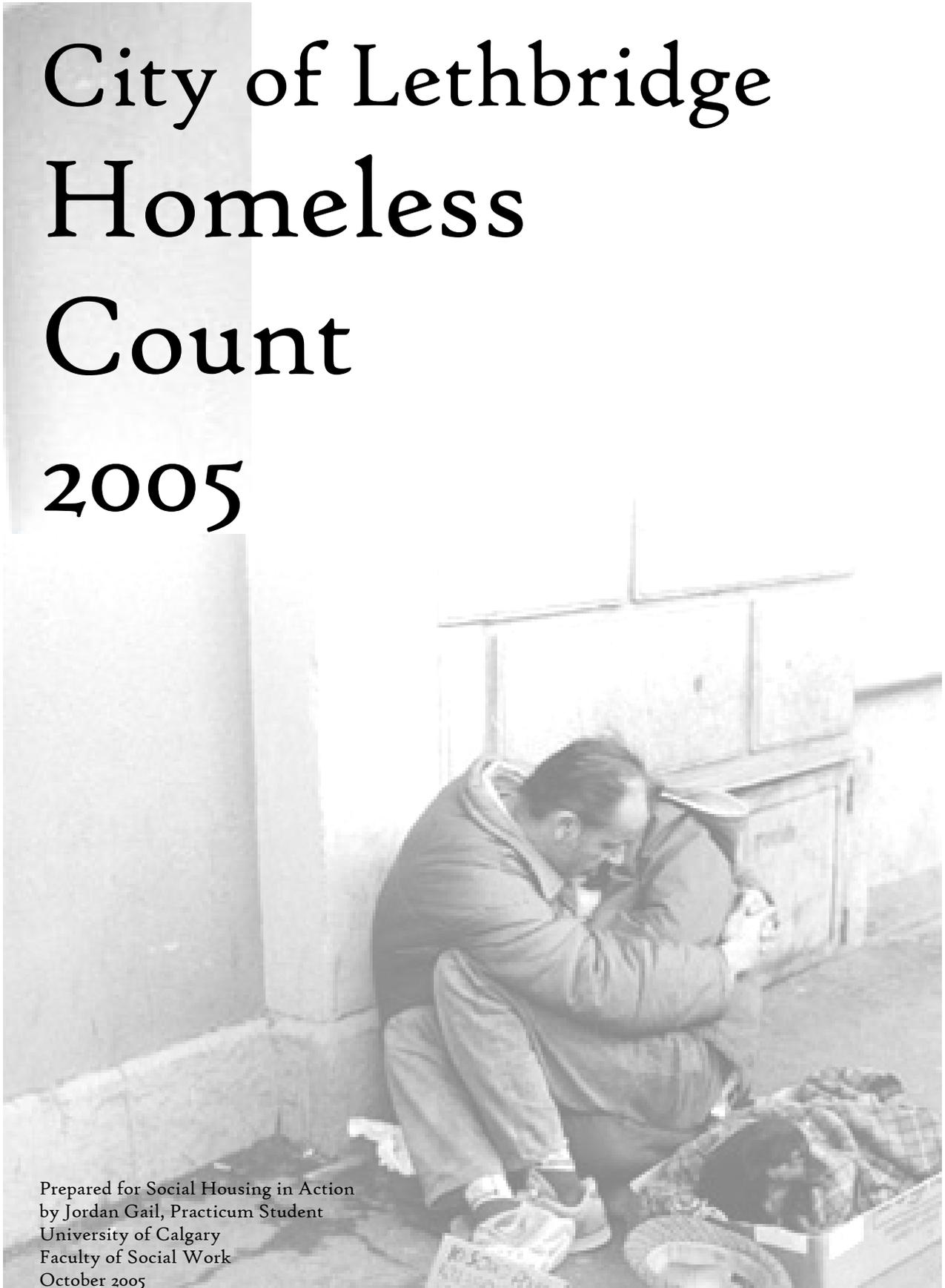


City of Lethbridge Homeless Count 2005

Prepared for Social Housing in Action
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October 2005



Acknowledgements

Coordinating the Lethbridge Homeless Count is an enormous task. On behalf of SHIA and The City of Lethbridge, we would like to thank and recognize the support of everyone who committed their time and energy to this project. Without the support of these individuals and agencies, this initiative wouldn't have been possible.

A number of service providers donated time to complete the Count within their agencies: YWCA Outreach and Harbour House, Lethbridge Shelter and Resource Centre, S.A.S.H.A., Native Women's Transition Home, Lethbridge Regional Hospital Emergency, Canadian Mental Health Crisis Beds, Southern Alcare Manor, and Wood's Homes Youth Shelter.

We would also like to thank the various organizations that provided invaluable information to this project: Laura House, Parkside Homes, Streets Alive, Sifton Family and Youth Services, Lethbridge Housing Authority, and Treaty 7 Urban Indian Housing Authority. Thank-you for assistance and collaborative spirit.

Deepest thanks to all 48 volunteer street enumerators who brought their time, energy, and enthusiasm to this project. We are once again overwhelmed with the support you have shown. The Homeless Count would not be possible without the support of these individuals.

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Executive Summary

The 2005 Homeless Count was once again conducted to gain a ‘snapshot’ of the Homeless population in Lethbridge. The purpose is to provide information to assist in the planning of the recent Homeless Initiative.

Revisions have been made to the process from the previous Count, setting the pace for future comparisons. Unfortunately, different methods used between the studies have limited the ability to compare with the ‘pilot’ conducted in 2004. Some changes to the Count included: an amendment of definitions; new questions in the data collection forms; the exclusion of the ‘at-risk’ category; and, increased specification regarding the type of agency information that would be added to the total ‘Homeless’ data.

To clarify the extent of the limitations involved in this type of research, the Count also incorporates qualitative information gained through interviews and literature. In maintaining consistency, it was once again conducted on October 6th and includes those individuals staying at an agency who would otherwise not have had a safe place to stay.

Key findings: On that evening, a total of 29 people who reported as being ‘Homeless’ were counted on the Street. There were 27 people counted as ‘Homeless’ within the Emergency Shelters. There were also 36 people counted as ‘Homeless’ in Transitional housing agencies. Between the Street and Agency data, we also found 77 individuals were ‘Unable to Find Affordable Housing’ in our community. In total, 131 individuals were reported as ‘Homeless and/or Unable to Find Affordable Housing’. We also found an additional 22 locations where there was evidence of people ‘sleeping rough’.

Incorporated into this paper is recent research showing that approximately 80% of the homeless population is not visible (Raising the Roofs, 2004). This statistic is included to offset the vast degree of limitations associated with this type of research. The inclusion of the additional 80% would indicate that 224 ‘Hidden’ individuals reside in Lethbridge, resulting in a total of 280 ‘Homeless’ individuals in our community.

It was also found that, between the affordable housing agencies, there were 417 people on waitlists. This means that, of the 410 existing units, there are an equal number still needing affordable accommodation. This problem is compounded with the inclusion of the 366 Treaty 7 Housing applications that are not included, but ‘in process’.

The benefits of this project may include: Increased education and awareness regarding the extent of homelessness in Lethbridge; Increased understanding concerning the issues faced by people who are homeless; increased emphasis around anti-oppressive strategies to positively impact this population, and; a continuation of an annual implementation that assists in eliminating homelessness and its impact in the City of Lethbridge.

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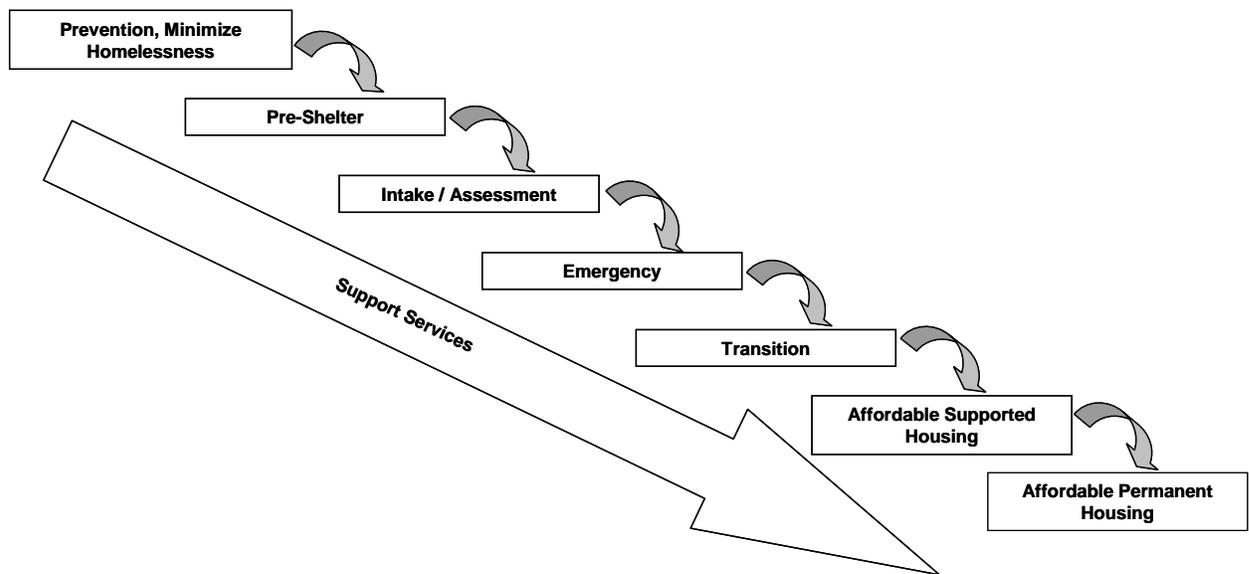
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Introduction

There is a problem with homelessness in Lethbridge. Because this issue is very complex and has only begun to gain recognition, it must be dealt with in many ways; these must focus on a range of mental, physical, social and economic factors. The complex web of individual and societal factors that combine to create homelessness (Indesol Ltd., 2003) requires that Lethbridge's response to the complexity of the issue be grounded in research.

The Lethbridge Homeless Count was conducted out of this response. It is titled the 'Homeless Count' to be succinct and express its objectivity. In doing so, it is important to note that each person counted is an individual whose worth is not precluded by the ability to garner housing. This research attempts to be sensitive to this while working towards a solution.

The incentive to address Homelessness has been undertaken with a three phase Community Action Plan (Indesol Ltd., 2003) that has led to the creation of a social housing committee, (e.g. Social Housing in Action- SHIA). This committee overlooks the implementation of the Community Action Plan (Fenton, 2004). As part of this incentive, a housing continuum has been created to better understand the process involved in eliminating homelessness:



(Indesol Ltd., 2003)

Purpose

The second annual Homeless Count expounds on the process and recommendations acquired from the Homeless Count 2004. It follows the general format of the 'Lethbridge

Homeless Count 2004' (Fenton, 2004) and the 'Biennial Count of Homeless Persons in Calgary' (Stroick, 2004). Although similar, revisions have been made to more accurately represent the realities of living in Lethbridge.

Using the information gained through the 2004 Homeless Count (Fenton, 2004), the Structure and Research Committee, a sub-committee of SHIA, has identified a need to further determine the extent of homelessness in Lethbridge. Although this research has built upon the information gained in 2004, substantial methodological differences prohibited a comparative analysis.

The Homeless Count was once again conducted October 6th with the intent of providing a snapshot of the extent of homelessness in Lethbridge. This was undertaken, not only to document the existence of this issue, but also to create awareness and assist in planning and policy development; this was done to support the City of Lethbridge's homeless incentive.

The focus of the study is to gain quantitative data of individuals interviewed 'on the street' and 'individuals accessing agency support'. Also collected was data for community housing options and the accessibility of affordable housing. This information was provided through a street questionnaire and agency data collection forms. The Lethbridge Housing Authority and Treaty 7 Urban Indian Housing Authority also provided numbers for community housing units and individuals on waitlists. We also contacted local Church or Religious Organizations that have been known to serve the Homeless population.

Definitions

The definitions used in the 2005 Homeless count are:

- Homeless - An individual who is: living on the street; staying in places not meant for human habitation; moving continuously among temporary housing arrangements provided by strangers, friends, or family; staying overnight in temporary shelters, or; has a permanent address but is not able to stay there on the evening of October 6th (Fenton, 2004), (Research and Evaluation Working Group, 2005).
- Unable to find affordable housing – An individual who is unable to find affordable housing (30% or less monthly income).
- Hidden Homeless – The individuals who are not visible. They are either improperly housed, or temporarily staying with relatives or friend, they constitute approximately 80% of the homeless population (Raising the Roof, 2004).
- Emergency Shelters – Provide temporary accommodation for homeless individuals and families who would otherwise sleep in the streets, generally including supports such as food, clothing and counseling.
- Transitional Housing – Provides short or long-term accommodation while assistance is obtained to address problems such as unemployment, addictions,

mental health issues, educational deficits, physical and cognitive disabilities, and domestic violence (Calgary Homeless Foundation, 2003).

These definitions have been used with intent in creating a more inclusive term for Homelessness. This is done while methodological constraints require specification around the types of agencies that provide services to these people. The definition of homeless has also been created in an attempt to incorporate the 2004 Homeless Count (Fenton, 2004), the First Report Card on Homelessness in Ottawa (Evaluation Working Group, 2005), the Biennial Count of Homeless Persons in Calgary (Stroick, 2004), and those used by SHIA (Indesol, 2003).

Methodology

The Homeless Count was conducted on October 6th 2005 between the hours of seven and nine p.m. Although this date reflects an income irregularity, it was retained to preserve consistency with the previous year. Beginning the process of benchmarking results for upcoming studies was also a priority. In response to prior recommendations (Fenton, 2004), the Count was conducted one hour later.

As mentioned above, the Lethbridge Homeless Count was modeled after Calgary's. In doing so a similar approach was taken, one that employs a dual focus of 'street count' and 'agency count'. Engaging these two areas concurrently optimized our use of available resources while decreasing the likelihood of double counting.

Apart from the street and agency count, the availability of affordable housing was also evaluated. This information was gained through the Street Count, Agency Count, and through contact with agencies involved in providing affordable housing. This information was included, (Table 2), in response to the multifaceted approach SHIA is taking to combat homelessness, (as shown in the housing continuum), which necessitates the availability of affordable housing.

Street Count

Due to limited time and resources, areas most frequented by homeless people were targeted. Although these areas were already established for the previous Count, the services of City Police, Emergency Medical Services, and the Mobile Urban Street Team, with additional representatives from the Lethbridge Emergency Shelter, were once again accessed. These individuals' expertise and familiarity with the homeless population assisted in renewing, and adding to, the areas of focus. These areas were then divided up and assigned to teams.

The teams were designed to have four members: two male, two female, and at least one aboriginal person. Each team was instructed to cover their areas within the two hour period. Each member was assigned a clipboard and instructed to follow a set protocol when interviewing individuals they encountered; this included a few brief questions and some observations, (Appendix E). The team leaders were given a map of their focus area,

screening questions, data collection sheets, emergency contact numbers, and shelter information cards for individuals without a place to stay. They also handed out granola bars as a thank you to participants.

For safety, the teams were instructed to stay together at all times and to bring flashlights and cell phones. Flashing beacons, (with whistles), and emergency contact numbers were also provided. Every team was to report every 15 minutes and a City Police Officer acted as a rover. Areas with decreased visibility were assigned to individuals who were familiar with the population being studied.

During the orientation, a City Police Officer instructed the volunteers in safety precautions. Prior to this, a Risk Manager was consulted and agreed on the course of action. Each individual who attended was required to sign an Oath of Confidentiality and volunteer information was recorded for Workers Compensation coverage. Volunteers were also required to sign in and out and were given to opportunity to fill out an evaluation form.

Agency Count

Community agencies that serve the homeless population were accessed. They were provided with written instructions, including definitions, about how to use the data collection forms, (Appendix B). These instructions were outlined in a meeting set up with the agencies and those who did not attend were contacted. The meeting was also an opportunity to discuss and elaborate on the purposes and roles of the study.

The agencies, defined as either Emergency Shelters, or Temporary Housing, were given data collection forms, (Appendix A), and were instructed to interview their clients between 7 and 9 on October 6. They were also provided with contact information in case of further questions and were offered a volunteer, if required, to assist in the Count. Two agencies were unable to complete the form but still provided us with the essential numbers for those hours. Two agencies chose to not participate.

Because of the incongruence of Transitional Housing agencies regarding emergency, temporary, and transition definitions, Emergency Shelters were composed of: Wood's Homes Youth Shelter; YWCA Harbor House; Lethbridge Shelter and Resource Centre, and; Lethbridge Regional Hospital Emergency Room. These agencies were also selected due to the lack of focus on emergency intervention; all other agencies were considered to be Transitional Housing.

Although many Transitional Homes do provide emergency support, they were excluded from the 'Homeless' total. This population is still accounted for with the inclusion of the 'Hidden' homeless statistic (Raising the Roof, 2004). This statistic shows that 80% of the any given homeless population is invisible, or 'hidden'. It is used to capture the numbers of individuals that are not residing on the Street or in Emergency Shelters (see Results).

Results

The Street Count found 29 individuals who identified themselves as homeless. The Agency Count, including Emergency Shelters and Transitional Housing, found 63 individuals who identified as homeless. As mentioned above, circumstances restrict the ability to properly assess the number of individuals who are homeless within Transitional Housing agencies. For this reason, this group has been excluded from the 'Homeless' total, instead incorporating recent research to gain a statistically accurate number of the total 'Homeless' population.

	Homeless	Identifying as Homeless but Accessing Transitional Housing	Unable to Find Affordable Housing
Street Count	29	N/A	27
Emergency Shelters	27	N/A	21
Transitional Housing	N/A	36	29
'Hidden' Homeless Statistic (+80%)	224	N/A	N/A
Total	280	36	77

*** People identifying as 'Homeless' did not necessarily identify as 'unable to access affordable housing', and vice versa.

Community Housing options	Number on Waitlist	Number of Units
LHA Community Housing and Special Needs	165	295
LHA Seniors Housing	66	
LHA Rent Supplement Program	127	
Treaty 7 Housing (2 bedroom)	17	115
Treaty 7 Housing (3 bedroom)	18	
Treaty 7 Housing (4 bedroom)	15	
Treaty 7 Housing (Elders list)	9	
Total	417	410

Source: Lethbridge Housing Authority, Treaty 7 Urban Indian Housing Authority

***This chart does not include the number of applications in process, (e.g. Treaty 7 Housing has 366 applications).

These results show that there are a substantial number of individuals in Lethbridge who are homeless, or without adequate housing. According to the 2005 Municipal census results (City of Lethbridge, 2005), as of April 1, 2005 the population of the City of

Lethbridge is 77, 202. When assessing the number of ‘Homeless’ per capita, there is a total of .04 %. When including the numbers of ‘Homeless’, ‘Unable to Find Affordable Housing’, and on waitlists for affordable housing, the number is 1%. This number does not include individuals who require affordable housing but have not been recorded or have accessed services.

The following information depicts some of the demographics of the individuals interviewed in the Street and Agency Count.

Table 3 – Recorded Gender and Observations on Family and Children						
	Homeless		Unable to Find Affordable Housing		Family	Children
	Male	Female	Male	Female		
Street Count	20	8	21	8	1	0
Emergency Shelters	22	5	11	10	9	12
Transitional Housing	10	10	7	10	5	10
Total	52	23	39	28	15	22

***Information gained through follow-up did not include gender, family, children, or race.

Table 4 – Race of Individuals Recorded			
	Aboriginal	Caucasian	Visible Minorities
Street Count	15	3	1
Emergency Shelters	22	24	1
Transitional Housing	10	10	1
Total	47	37	3

Limitations

Due to the vast amount of barriers that are inevitable in this type of research, many limitations exist:

- The number of agencies that exist in the community, (e.g. an increased number of agencies should raise the number of people found accessing services).
- The weather.
- The time that people reside in certain locations.
- The inability to count people ‘sleeping rough’ as homeless.
- Some organizations are not open in the evening.
- Inaccurate information may be more likely from individuals who are feeling intimidated.

- The chosen date reflects an irregularity in income. Therefore, a number of individuals who are homeless may be able to afford temporary shelter, (i.e. hotels).
- Visual and spatial restrictions allow for an opportunity to miss people while walking in the assigned area.
- The street count teams did not enter any buildings.
- Race was enumerated through observation.
- Limited time made it difficult to garner agency support.

Discussion

Although there are limitations in this study, the information gained does have a degree of application in providing a number, although likely rather low, to the faces we see on the street. For this report, information has been gathered not only quantitatively, but qualitatively in an attempt to elaborate on the degree of limitations that exist.

Following the Street and Agency enumeration many service providers, including local Church and Religious Organizations, were contacted for information. Of the agencies that are known to serve this population, (e.g. St. Vincent de Paul, Streets Alive, Salvation Army), only Streets Alive Mission had provided services on October 6th. They provided food to 42 individuals they identified as homeless and approximated that at least 15 would be unable to access affordable housing.

There is no way to determine that the homeless definitions used by the Church and Religious Organizations are the same as ours, but the numbers may still have a degree of overlap with the information gained through the Street and Agency Count. Interestingly enough, while 29 people were counted on the Street in Lethbridge, the 42 individuals accounted for were served at approximately the same time and in one local. This number doesn't include the individuals that Streets Alive serves in a nearby hotel.

The Shelter and Resource Center was also contacted after the enumeration. During the Count, they recorded 21 people as 'Homeless' and 11 as 'Unable to Find Affordable Housing'. This total did not account for the total number of 59 individuals that had checked in that evening. Although again, there is likely some overlap between enumerated individuals and those accessing these services, this data only further elaborates on the prevalence of the limitations in this type of study.

During the Homeless Count we advised the street count enumerators to identify areas that had shown evidence of habitation. Accordingly, we had a reported 22 locations that showed evidence of 'sleeping rough'. By 'sleeping rough', we are referring to makeshift or temporary shelters that are largely out of sight of the general public, (i.e. Coulees). These areas were marked for consideration in regards to subsequent 'Counts'. It is likely many individuals 'sleeping rough' were counted, although it is unlikely that we had counted them all.

This report also contains information regarding the race of individuals enumerated. The numbers show that homelessness is a problem that spans across racial boundaries (table 4). To avoid possible conflicts, enumerators were instructed to acquire these numbers through observation. In this, it is likely that some individuals were not properly identified according to their descent. Within the category of ‘visible minorities’, we found there to be one Mediterranean identified on the Street, one Sudanese identified in an Emergency Shelter, and one Japanese identified in a Transitional Home. Whether this information was gained strictly through observation is questionable. Irregardless, the numbers gained show that homelessness is not an aboriginal problem in Lethbridge.

This study, other than for documentary and informative purposes, is limited in its application. Comparing annual ‘snapshots’ of individuals who are homeless only serves to, imprecisely, highlight the efficacy of our emergency supports. The reality of including people accessing ‘Emergency Shelters’ as ‘Homeless’ means that a genuine reduction in numbers must correlate to a decrease in waiting lists for secondary services like transitional housing or affordable and appropriate housing.

Evaluations and Recommendations

Rating	Strongly Disagree			Strongly Agree	
	1	2	3	4	5
Overall I felt the orientation prepared me for the experience	0	1	1	15	20
I understood the expectations of my role	1	0	0	11	25
The area I was responsible for was adequate for the time allotted for the count	2	0	2	8	25
I felt safe with my team	1	0	1	4	31
Total	4	1	4	38	101

*** Of the 48 volunteer street enumerators, there were 37 volunteer evaluations received.

Volunteer concerns and recommendations

The five most frequent recommendations were:

- Give more granola bars, or more than just granola bars, to participants.
- Give better direction of areas to cover, more specified maps.
- Go out later, or during different times of the day.
- Only one clipboard per team
- Pick target spots and set up coffee to attract participants.

Agency concerns and recommendations

- A report done over a period of a month will be more reflective of the actual numbers.

- Coordinate more agency participation in street enumeration (use people already dealing with the population).
- Use agencies without a monetary agenda.
- Due to possible intimidation, a more accurate account may be made through observation using experienced personnel rather than asking.
- The process of asking, recording, and rewarding is patronizing and demeaning for people who are homeless.

Coordinator concerns and recommendations

- Findings must be distributed to agencies and volunteers involved. They must also be available to local community groups and the individuals who participated in the study.
- Create and include agency evaluations for next year.
- Better clarification to agencies regarding what to define as ‘Homeless’ and ‘Unable to Access Affordable Housing’. In this problematic area, further revisions may be warranted.
- Give a ‘heads up’ to agencies and allow more time for them to prepare for the Count.
- Further clarify the procedure in ‘offering’ a granola bar as a thank you, not as a reward.
- Allow individuals to self-identify race/ethnicity.

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Appendix B – Agency Instructions

Agency Instructions

As part of a SHIA Initiative, the Structure and Research Committee wants to define the extent of homelessness in our community. To do this, SHIA is organizing the second annual Homeless Count on Thursday October 6, 2005. The data collected from this study will be used to further meet the needs of homeless persons in Lethbridge.

As an agency that provides services to homeless persons or persons at risk of being homeless you are invited to participate in the Homeless Count on October 6, 2005. This count will give us a snap shot in time of the Homeless situation in Lethbridge. As such we are requesting that on the evening of October 6 between the hours of **7 – 9 p.m.**, each agency count the number of persons who meet the criteria outlined in the data collection sheets.

We would appreciate your assistance in this matter and would like to offer a volunteer to come to your facility and assist you with the Count that evening. In order to get as accurate of results as possible we need support from you. For further information or to request a volunteer please contact Leah Theaker at 320-3051. The data collection sheets can be returned through fax at 380-2512, or we will pick them up. Thank you.

Definitions for Data Collection Sheets

Homeless – An individual who is: living on the street; staying in places not meant for human habitation; moving continuously among temporary housing arrangements provided by strangers, friends, or family; staying overnight in temporary shelters, or; has a permanent address but is not able to stay there on the evening of October 6th

Unable to find affordable housing - Check box if your client is at your facility because she/he is unable to find affordable housing (30% or less monthly income)

** If a client does not meet the above criteria, do not record any information

Gender - Indicate (F) for female or (M) for male

Age - Indicate known age or estimated age

Race - Indicate observed race (please do not ask for this information)

Family - Indicate if you are serving a family unit

Children - If you are serving a family, please indicate how many children you are serving

* We are looking for the above information for each client that applies to all or any of the two categories (homeless, and /or unable to find affordable housing)

* Please do not record client names

Appendix C - Oath of Confidentiality



CITY OF
Lethbridge

As a condition of my engagement as a volunteer I,
_____, agree to maintain confidentiality of all
information of a personal, financial, or technical nature disclosed to, or ascertained by me
in the performance of my engagement, including any information, policy or knowledge
generated as a function of the homeless count conducted on behalf of the City of
Lethbridge.

Signature

Date

Witness

Date

Appendix D – Volunteer Orientation Agenda

Homeless Count Orientation Agenda

. Volunteer Registration

- Sign In
- Sign Oath
- lights, reflective tape and name tag

. Go to Council Chambers

- Diane Randell
- Mayor Tarleck
- George Carscadden
- Jordan Gail
 - o Screening questions
 - o Data collection sheet
 - o Emergency numbers
 - o Check in every ½ hour
 - o Announce teams and designated meeting areas

. Team leader meeting

- Hand out maps
- Answer any questions
- Make sure they know to document which agency they picked up the forms from
- Cell phones – made sure they assign a number and inform Leah at registration desk
- Granola Bars

. Team Leaders meet with teams

- Get Clip board
- Confirm contact number with registration
- Decide who's driving.

Appendix E - Volunteer Screening Questions

PROCEDURE

1. Introduce yourself as a Volunteer for Social Housing in Action. Explain that you are doing a count for people who don't have a place to sleep tonight and ask permission to talk with them. Inform them that it will take only a minute and that they have the right to quit at any time.
2. Ask... **“Have you already been counted tonight?”**
3. If **“yes”**, thank them and move on to the next person.
DO NOT RECORD ANY INFORMATION
4. If **“no”**, ask... **“Do you have a place to sleep tonight?”**
5. If **“no”** hand them a card.
RECORD “CARD GIVEN” UNDER SLEEPING PLACE HEADING
6. If **“yes”**, ask... **“Where will you stay tonight?”**
 - If the answer is **“at home”** - Thank them and move on to the next person.
DO NOT RECORD ANY INFORMATION
 - If the answer is:
 - o *Shelter,*
 - o *Other Agency,*
 - o *Friends (and have no permanent address)*
 - o *Alley, Street, Doorway, Coulees***RECORD INFORMATION UNDER SLEEPING PLACE HEADING**
7. Ask... **“Are you able to find affordable housing in Lethbridge?”**
8. **Please record the following information**
 - Record their age – please record if known or estimated
 - Record their race – based on **observation only**
 - Record how many families you encounter **observation only**
 - Record how many children either "on their own" or in a family **observation only**
9. Thank the individual, give them give away

Appendix H – Agency Data Results

Agency Data Results - Emergency Shelters		
	Homeless	Unable to access affordable housing
YWCA Harbour House	2	9
Woods Homes	4	1
Emergency at Hospital	0	0
Lethbridge Correctional	N/A	N/A
Lethbridge Shelter and Resource Centre	21	11
Total	27	21

Agency Data Results – Transitional Housing		
	Homeless	Unable to access affordable housing
Southern Alcare Manor	10	1
Canadian Mental Health Association	0	0
Native Women’s Transitional Home	7	7
TRAC Youth Outreach	N/A	N/A
Sifton Family and Youth Services	4	4
SASHA	0	9
Parkside Homes	14	8
Laura House	1	0
Total	36	29

Appendix I – Homeless Count Process

1. Get familiar with the prior Counts, (2004, 2005), and relevant material, (i.e. ethical guidelines in conducting research with homeless individuals, homeless counts of other cities).
2. Review process recommendations and establish a plan of revisions
3. Get SHIA Structure and Research committee to update agencies on the Count date
4. Begin recruiting volunteers, (i.e. University students, College Students, Human Service agencies, interest groups).
5. Print agency information, (e.g. data collection sheets, instructions)
6. Contact agencies, (see Appendix H), and inform them about the Count, set a meeting time that gives sufficient notice.
 - Priority to Emergency Shelters, (e.g. Shelter, Woods, Harbour house)
 - Follow up with agencies that did not attend, (including Streets Alive)
7. Organize meeting to review mapping locations
 - LRPS
 - EMS
 - MUST
 - Parks (?)
8. Print maps, and update large maps based on new locations
9. Book foyer and council chambers
10. Meet with Risk Management and Health and Safety
11. Work with administrative assistant to print off contact cards, volunteer name tags, and data collection sheets. Also arrange for catering to occur at the orientation.
12. Change banner
13. Arrange Police Officer to do safety at orientation