



Contact: Erin Porterfield
Tel. 402-561-7597
E-mail: eporterfield@mail.unomaha.edu

For Immediate Release

2009 COMMUNITY-WIDE COUNT OF HOMELESS FINDS MORE PEOPLE

The new community-wide Point in Time Count of homeless residents in Omaha and Council Bluffs indicates a 5% increase in homelessness. Metro Area Continuum of Care for the Homeless (MACCH) counted 1,258 people experiencing homelessness during the annual point in time count on January 29, 2009 compared to 1,197 on January 31, 2008. This total includes people who were in emergency shelter, transitional housing or living on the streets in Douglas and Sarpy Counties (1,074 people) and Pottawattamie County (184 people).

MACCH, comprised of agencies serving the homeless, approaches the increase with caution due to changes in methodology, as well as the additional number of emergency shelter and transitional housing beds available. But a comparison of 2008's local data and national statistics offer a glimpse of some additional local trends which include:

- The percentage of people in families counted increased from 22% in 2008 to 24% in 2009. Additionally, the number of people in families in 2008 was 269 and has expanded to 300 in 2009.
- The percent of people counted who are chronically homeless remains above national statistics. People who are chronically homeless locally represent 21% of the people counted as compared to national point in time data percentages at 18%. This 21% represents a significant decrease from 2008's 46% of people counted. According to the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), a person is considered chronically homeless if they have a disability and have been homeless continuously for one year or homeless four times in the last three years. Locally, 550 people were counted as being chronically homeless in 2008 and this year's count revealed 270 individuals as chronically homeless.
- Less people were counted who were unsheltered or living on the streets. The opening of New Visions—Joshua House could be the reason for this decline.
- The number of people staying in Emergency Shelter has increased from 707 in 2008 to 783 in 2009.

“We are cautious when applying the results of this data, but the findings do indicate that more people are coping with the agony of homelessness,” said Erin Porterfield, executive director of MACCH. “On the other hand, the good news is that less people were trapped in the cycle of chronic homelessness as compared to 2008. The decline may result from a focus on exits to homelessness like to permanent housing with increased income. The decrease is also due partly to HUD's requirement to omit the number of chronic homelessness people counted in transitional housing programs. The number of people in this category was reduced by fifty-two people for this reason.”

This year's count was conducted by volunteers on the early morning hours of January 29. The effort included collaboration with Omaha Police Department. The police were able to assist in counting the number of homeless individuals and families sleeping in parks, by the Missouri River or in camps. This collaboration ensures a more reliable count of people that are living on the streets.

“Understanding who and how many people are homeless leads us to strategies of preventing and ending homelessness, for all people in our community,” states Porterfield.

MACCH's mission is to lead a collaborative network to prevent and eliminate homelessness.

###