



# Homelessness still a problem in Madison County; meeting set

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As Madison County emerges from the recession which gripped the nation from 2006 to 2009, economic conditions in the county have significantly improved. The county is experiencing a significant drop in unemployment, home construction is steadily increasing and new businesses are opening.

But the news is not all good. Madison County is also experiencing increased demands for emergency housing and food assistance, and all too frequently homeless shelters are fully occupied.

For 24 hours in January, volunteers from the Madison County Partnership to End Homelessness, social workers and students from Southern Illinois University Edwardsville (SIUE) conducted an extensive canvas of those who are experiencing homelessness, individuals and families staying in shelters, as well as those unsheltered -- literally sleeping outside -- on the street, in a car or abandoned building on the night of the canvas.

A *Point-In-Time* count is required by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) to demonstrate federal funding eligibility for many assistance programs, including emergency shelter operations as well as transitional and permanent supportive housing projects.

The 2015 *Point-In-Time* canvas showed Madison County with a homeless count of 397, including 162 children. 176 of those experiencing homelessness provided detailed information which will be used to develop programs that address the issue.

Frank Miles, administrator of Madison County Community Development which administers many of the programs in place to aid those experiencing homelessness, said the actual number of people experiencing homelessness in the county is higher than the 397 identified in the canvas.

“People experiencing homelessness extends beyond the people forced to sleep on the street or who seek shelter in an underpass,” Miles said. “It could be the young boy or girl who is your child’s classmate. The family staying at an economy hotel might not be on vacation, they might be homeless and forced to use what money that have on a place to sleep for a night or two.”

“To identify every person experiencing homelessness in a 24-hour period is virtually impossible. Despite the efforts of the Madison County Partnership to End Homelessness and the efforts of the local, state and federal governments, homelessness is still a problem,” Miles stated.

Of the 176 which participated in the survey, 114 (68%) were female and 118 (67%) were Caucasian. 73 people (41%) were staying with a family member or friend, 27 (15%) were staying in transitional housing, 26 (14%) spent the previous night in an emergency shelter and 13 (7.5%) were living on the streets.

David Harrison of Madison County Community Development said there are many reasons for people being homeless. “One statistic which is continually prevalent among this population is mental health issues. 76 of the respondents (43%) have been diagnosed with mental conditions.”

While Harrison attributes the economy as a key cause for homelessness, he said there are many others. “Unemployment, or insufficient income, was listed as the cause for homelessness by 67 people. In many cases, people are employed but are working at minimum wage jobs and are unable to cover rent, utilities, food and other expenses. 41 of the persons surveyed had jobs,” Harrison said.

Other causes for homelessness included domestic violence, personal illness, building conditions and bad credit.

### ***Homelessness To Be Addressed at Annual Meeting of***

### ***Madison County Partnership To End Homelessness***

The issue of homelessness, and poverty in general, will be addressed at the 17<sup>th</sup> annual community meeting of the Madison County Partnership to End Homelessness, a consortium of more than 100 volunteers and representatives of not-for-profit and governmental agencies committed to ending homelessness.

One of the key segments of the annual meeting will be a panel discussion addressing the impact of homelessness on children. “Homelessness is bad enough for an adult, but for a child who doesn’t understand the situation, or why they don’t have a home, it can be traumatic and can negatively affect development,” Harrison added.

The Madison County Partnership to End Homelessness annual meeting will be held from 9:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. on Thursday, April 16 at the Edwardsville Moose Lodge, 7371 Marine Road in Edwardsville. The public is invited to attend the annual meeting.