



# Many Families in Indianapolis Not Able to Find Shelter

The number of individuals found on the night of the annual Marion County Point-in-Time Count (the Count) decreased from 1,897 in 2014 to 1,666 in 2015, similar to the levels in 2012 and 2013. A point-in-time count by definition will not count everyone who experiences homelessness, but this snapshot is the best evidence available to quantify the nature and extent of homelessness (according to HUD's definition) in Indianapolis.

On the evening of January 28, 2015, the Indiana University Public Policy Institute (Institute) and the Coalition for Homelessness Intervention and Prevention (CHIP) coordinated the annual Point-in-Time Count (the Count) of those experiencing homelessness in Marion County. The Count is conducted in accordance with requirements set forth by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). HUD requires local counts to estimate the extent of homelessness nationwide. In addition to reporting to HUD, the data collected from the Count is used to assess changes over time and identify emerging needs of those experiencing homelessness in the Indianapolis and Marion County community.

**N**ational research suggests the annual number of people experiencing homelessness at some point is 3-5 times the number counted. In 2015, then, the Marion County estimate for the year is between 5,000 and 8,330 (Count results X 3 and Count results X 5).

## Methodology

Shelters, safe havens, and transitional housing providers were informed of the Count date and time in advance. Providers were given the option of conducting the Count with their own staff or using volunteers provided by CHIP and the Institute. Those that chose the staff-directed route were provided the survey instru-

**Table 1:** Sheltered and unsheltered individuals, Marion County, January 2012-2015

	2012	2013	2014	2015	% change 2014-15
Low temperature night of the count	30°F	19°F	-3°F	15°F	-
Persons in emergency shelters	848	861	991	817	-21%
Persons in transitional housing	601	594	810	715	-13%
Persons in Safe Havens*	25	24	22	23	+4%
Persons unsheltered	173	120	74	111	+33%
Number of families	177	151	161	136	-18%
Veterans	351	320	370	389	+5%
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,647</b>	<b>1,599</b>	<b>1,897</b>	<b>1,666</b>	<b>-14%</b>
	2012	2013	2014	2015	% point change 2014-15
Veterans as a percent of the adults counted	24%	25%	24%	28%	4
Percent of total counted under 18 years old	21%	22%	19%	18%	-1
Percent of total counted 18-62 years old	75%	77%	78%	82%	4
Percent of total counted over 62 years old	3%	4%	4%	3%	-1

\*According to HUD, a Safe Haven is a form of supportive transitional or permanent housing serving hard to reach people with severe mental illness, who are in unsheltered locations and have been unwilling or unable to participate in supportive services. It is a separate category from transitional or emergency shelter.

ment and directions for administration prior to the day of the Count. On the evening of the Count, 16 teams—composed of trained volunteers from Indiana University–Purdue University Indianapolis, the Indianapolis Metropolitan Police Department Homeless Unit, and various outreach organizations—interviewed both sheltered and unsheltered individuals experiencing homelessness throughout the county. Institute and CHIP staff met with members of the Professional Blended Street Outreach Team (PBSO) to map likely locations of unsheltered persons. These professional outreach leaders regularly work with unsheltered persons to link them with services and provide supplies. The data collected by the teams were integrated with the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS). This year, HMIS included data from 20 eligible shelters and housing programs.



The 2015 Point-in-Time Count of Marion County surveyed and recorded data about individuals and families that met the most recent definition of “homeless” outlined by HUD. HUD defines someone as homeless if they meet one of the two following conditions:

(1) Individuals and families who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence and includes a subset for an individual who is exiting an institution where he or she resided for 90 days or less and who resided in an emergency shelter or a place not meant for human habitation immediately before entering that institution;

(2) Individuals and families who are fleeing, or are attempting to flee, domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, stalking, or other dangerous or life-threatening conditions that relate to violence against the individual or a family member.

## Findings

During this year’s count 1,666 individuals were identified as experiencing homelessness. Though the 2015 Count saw a 33 percent increase in the number of unsheltered individuals over the previous year, the total number (sheltered and unsheltered) was down 14 percent (Table 1). The increase in unsheltered persons in 2015 can be explained, in part, by the extremely cold temperatures during the 2014 count, leading to Horizon House serving as an emergency shelter in 2014, which only happens during extreme weather.

Table 2 details the most common reasons reported by those experiencing homelessness as the cause of their current lack of housing. For both individuals and families, loss of job was the reason selected most often for lack of housing; replacing leaving an abusive situation as most common response for the first time since 2013 for families.

**Table 2: Top three reasons (in order) for lack of permanent housing, Marion County, 2013–2015**

	2013	2014	2015
<b>Individuals</b>	Lost job Asked to leave Drugs or alcohol	Lost job Asked to leave Drugs or alcohol	Lost job Incarceration Drugs or alcohol
<b>Families</b>	Lost job Abusive situation Asked to leave	Abusive situation Lost job Asked to leave	Abusive situation Lost job Asked to leave

**Table 3: Age and gender of those experiencing homelessness, Marion County, January 2015**

	Under 18	18-24	25-34	35-49	50-61	Over 61	Total
<b>Total</b>	<b>293</b>	<b>121</b>	<b>244</b>	<b>421</b>	<b>512</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>1,666</b>
Female	145	68	132	141	85	15	586
Male	148	50	110	280	425	60	1,073
Transgender	0	3	2	0	2	0	7

County, January 2015

Table 3 details the Count results by age and gender. Almost twice as many males as females were counted and the females were younger than the males. This year, seven people identified as transgender compared to two last year.

As Table 4 indicates, the number of African Americans experiencing homelessness was highest among the race and ethnicity groups in every category, except unsheltered. Each person was asked about their ethnicity separately from their race.

**Table 4: Race and ethnicity of adults experiencing homelessness, Marion County, January 2015**

	Hispanic or Latino (any race)	African American/ Black	American Indian or Alaskan Native	Asian	White	Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	Multiracial	Other
<b>Total unsheltered</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>63</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>Total sheltered</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>868</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>618</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>17</b>
Emergency	24	482	10	3	309	2	11	12
Transitional	18	371	5	7	301	0	31	5
Safe Haven	2	15	0	0	8	0	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>907</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>681</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>17</b>

**Table 5:** Number of families without permanent housing, Marion County, January 2015

	Emergency shelters	Transitional shelters	Total sheltered	Unsheltered	Total
<b>Total number of families</b>	<b>87</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>134</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>136</b>
Number of adults in families	93	57	150	2	152
Number of adults in chronically homeless* families	9	0	9	2	11
Number of children in families	165	114	279	6	285
Number of children in chronically homeless* families	14	0	14	6	20
Number of people in families	258	171	429	8	437
<b>Total number of people in chronically homeless* families</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>31</b>

\*Chronic homelessness is defined as: an unaccompanied homeless individual with a disabling condition or an adult member of a homeless family who has a disabling condition who had either been continuously homeless for a year or more or who has had at least four episodes of homelessness in the past three years. To be considered homeless, persons must have been sleeping in a place not meant for human habitation (e.g., living on the streets) and/or in emergency shelter/safe haven during that time.

There were 136 families experiencing homelessness on the night of the Count (Table 5). Within these families, 152 individuals were adults (over age 18) and 285 were children. Two families with 6 children between them were reported as unsheltered. Additionally, 20 women stated they were pregnant. Seventeen of these women were staying in emergency shelters, two in transi-

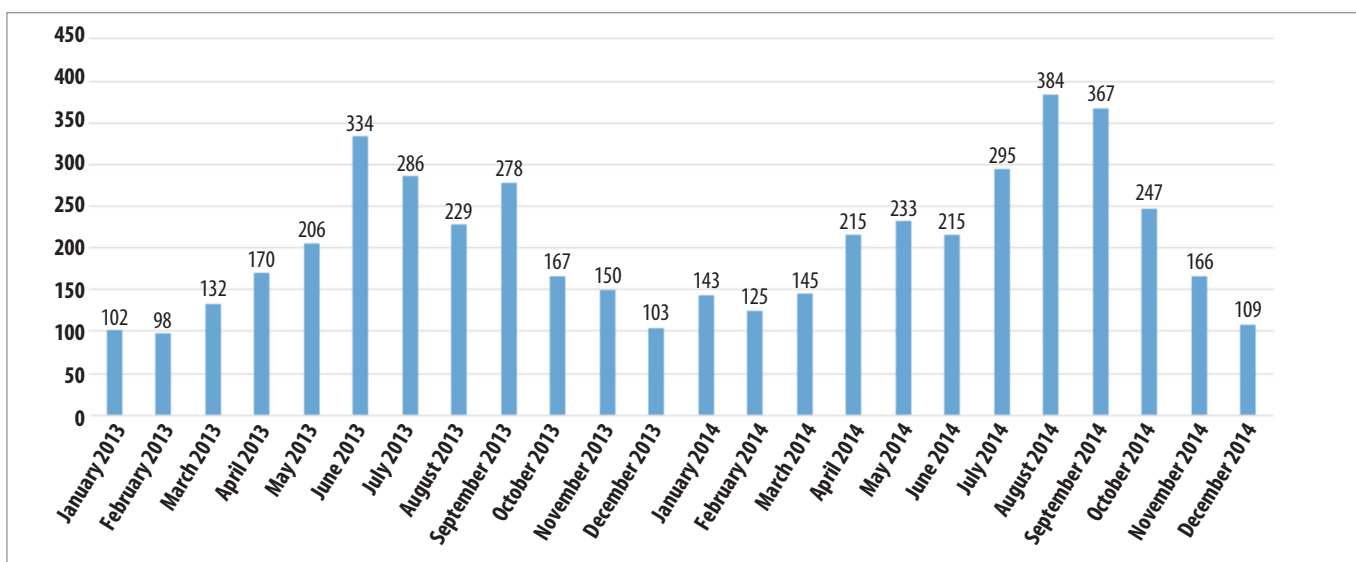
tional housing facilities, and one of these women reported she would be sleeping in a street, park, or other open space on the evening of the Count. Most of the families (85 percent) surveyed in the Count were led by a female head-of-household. Forty percent of adults in surveyed families had been victims of abuse.

Not all families experiencing homelessness are receiving the help they desperately need in Marion County. According to data acquired from Connect2Help, an organization that connects providers with homeless and domestic violence shelters, 25 percent of its calls for both individuals and families experiencing homelessness went unmet in 2014. The majority of calls were unmet, according to Connect2Help, because there was no shelter space available. Other reasons included that the client refused the service, was ineligible, or hung up during the call to Connect2Help. As indicated in Figure 1, the number of unmet calls from individuals and families fluctuates, but has ranged between 100 and 400 unmet calls a month over the last two years. In 2014, there were 804 unmet calls made by single parent families for homeless or domestic violence shelters in Marion County and 142 unmet calls made by two parent families.

According to service providers, the primary reason for unmet need for families is a lack of capacity in their shelters. They do not have enough beds to service the need. Finding the space for a family, especially with several children, is a difficult task.

While Marion County has seen a decrease in unemployment rates, the number of people living in poverty has increased. In 2013, one in five residents of Marion County (21 percent) lived in poverty (U.S. Census Bureau) with 30 percent of children in Marion County living in poverty. Among families in Marion County, 45 percent of female-headed households

**Figure 1:** Number of unmet calls from Connect2Help to homeless shelters/domestic violence shelters, 2013-2014





with children under 18 live in poverty. For those children growing up in impoverished families, the chance of climbing the economic ladder in Indiana is slim at best. An Indianapolis child that is raised in the bottom 5th of families, in terms of income, only has a 4.8 percent chance of ever entering the top 5th of income-earning families as an adult. Indiana is ranked 48th in economic mobility (Indiana Institute for Working Families, 2014). Of the families surveyed in the 2015 Count, 29 percent were employed, but simply having a job is not providing these families with the income they need to maintain housing.

In addition to the Point-in-Time Count, CHIP and the Institute collect data on the number of school-age children serviced by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's McKinney-Vento Act (Table 6). McKinney-Vento operates under a different definition of homelessness than HUD and includes children "doubled-up" in shared housing with friends or family members other than their parents. The Act provides funding that eases some of the restrictions surrounding school registration and provides transportation services to students experiencing homelessness, even if their current housing is temporarily out of district.

**Table 6: Children by age, Marion County, McKinney-Vento data, January 2015**

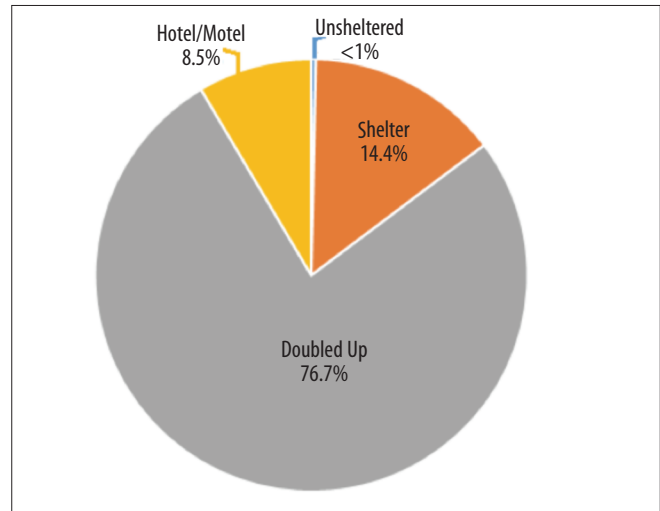
School District	8 and under	9-12	13-16	17 and up	Total
Decatur	71	117	143	36	367
Emma Donnan Middle School	0	3	31	0	34
Indianapolis Public Schools (IPS)	288	242	181	96	807
Lawrence	59	69	90	37	255
Manual High School	0	0	12	41	53
Perry	36	36	32	9	113
Pike	40	46	43	38	167
Speedway	22	11	10	2	45
Warren	80	132	102	92	406
Washington	115	114	99	33	361
Wayne	115	122	184	56	477
<b>Totals</b>	<b>826</b>	<b>892</b>	<b>927</b>	<b>440</b>	<b>3,085</b>

\*Schools that reported in 2014, but not 2015: Damar Charter, Franklin, Irvington Prep, Kipp, Paramount School of Excellence, Phalen Leadership Academy

In January 2015, 11 districts reported McKinney-Vento data, which revealed 3,085 children living in non-permanent housing in Marion County. Of those children whose location was reported, 77 percent were reported as doubled-up while less than 1 percent were unsheltered or unattached and 14 percent

were living in shelters. Another 9 percent were living in motels/hotels (Figure 2).

**Figure 2: Reported location of children experiencing homelessness by McKinney-Vento liaisons, Marion County, 2015**



The number of children reported by the U.S. Department of Education definition as homeless are not included in the Point-in-Time Count unless they are living in shelters or are unsheltered. These data through McKinney-Vento are important to provide a more complete picture of school-aged children experiencing housing instability in Marion County. Because doubled-up families are not counted in the Point-in-Time Count, neither data source (Point-in-Time Count or McKinney-Vento) includes families with children not of school age who are doubled-up or

**H**aving to leave a pet can create a barrier to entering a shelter for many people experiencing homelessness. A question added this year asked people who are unsheltered about pets. Approximately 80 pets were reported.

families with school-aged children who do not report to their school that they are experiencing homelessness. The data do not capture the full extent of the number of families experiencing homelessness or at risk of it.

Table 7 depicts the highest level of education achieved by adults experiencing homelessness, as reported by respondents on the evening of the Count. Of the people who responded to

**Table 7:** Level of education for adults experiencing homelessness, Marion County, January 2015

Highest grade completed	Sheltered	Unsheltered	Total
K-8	30	5	35
Some high school	175	22	197
GED	164	12	176
High school graduate	470	17	487
Some college*	127	16	143
College graduate	137	4	141
Post graduate	9	1	10

\*Reported by respondents on the evening of the Count, but these data are not collected by, or included in, HMIS.

this question, 56 percent had at least a GED or high school diploma, a 5 percentage point increase over 2014, and 25 percent reported having continued their education beyond high school, a 4 percentage point decrease since 2014.

Table 8 outlines the various types of assistance and aid and the number of people who were utilizing them. With 501 recipients, food stamps (SNAP) was the most commonly used, by far. On the night of the Count, 389 individuals reported they were veterans, but only 19 percent reported receiving some type of veteran's aid. Of those who answered a question regarding their access to health care, over half (55 percent) reported they had health coverage of some form (Table 9).

Table 10 summarizes the medical conditions affecting the health of those experiencing homelessness in Marion County. Of the total adult population, under half (44 percent) struggle

**Table 8:** Aid received by adults experiencing homelessness, Marion County, January 2015 (respondents chose all that applied)

Aid Received	Sheltered	Unsheltered	Total
Social Security	68	4	72
Social Security Disability	92	6	98
Supplemental Security (SSI)	66	6	72
Temporary Assistance to Need Families (TANF)	28	2	30
Child Support	29	1	30
Food Stamps (SNAP)	459	42	501
Women, Infants, and Children (WIC)	29	1	30
Unemployment	9	1	10
Workers Comp	2	1	3
Veterans Benefits	27	2	29
Veterans Disability	56	1	57

**Table 9:** Health coverage of adults experiencing homelessness, Marion County, January 2015

Health coverage	Sheltered	Unsheltered	Total
Yes	622	39	661
No	468	38	506
Unsure	25	1	26

with issues of alcohol or drug abuse. Also slightly under half (47 percent) of the adult population suffers either a physical, mental, or developmental disability. These conditions are self-reported and, thus, are likely under reported. These categories are not mutually exclusive, that is, a respondent could select more than one condition.

**Table 10:** Reported medical conditions of adults experiencing homelessness, Marion County, January 2015

Medical Condition	Sheltered	Unsheltered	Total
Alcohol	388	26	414
Drugs	311	12	323
Physical disability	261	27	288
Developmental disability	75	8	83
Mental illness	382	35	417
HIV	48	2	50
Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)*	86	14	100
Brain injury*	38	9	47
Other chronic health condition	264	8	272

\*Reported by respondents on the evening of the Count, but these data are not collected by, or included in, HMIS.

Various subpopulations among the adults are shown in Table 11, including 184 individuals suffering from chronic homelessness. Approximately one in four adults surveyed reported a previous felony conviction, a status that can cause significant barriers to overcoming homelessness. In 1996, The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act stated that any person convicted of a drug-related felony, after 1996, would incur a lifetime ban from receiving federal food stamps or TANF aid. This presents a major barrier for ex-felons as they struggle to reenter society in a positive and stable way. Over the years, a majority of states have chosen to eliminate or modify their implementation of the law in one way or another. In Indiana, the lifetime ban is incurred if the individual is not participating in a reentry court program (Indiana Code



**Table 11:** Count results by subpopulations for adults 18 and older, Marion County, January 2015

Homeless subpopulation	Persons in emergency shelters	Persons in transitional shelters	Persons in Safe Havens	Persons unsheltered	Total
<b>Total counted</b>	<b>817</b>	<b>715</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>111</b>	<b>1,666</b>
Chronically homeless*	132	0	5	47	184
Severely mentally ill	187	254	0	37	540
Chronic substance abuse problems	156	254	17	27	531
Veterans	28	345	3	13	389
Victims of domestic violence	194	140	12	25	429
Felony conviction	162	206	9	39	416
Foster care	48	68	1	16	133

\*Chronic homelessness is defined as: an unaccompanied homeless individual with a disabling condition or an adult member of a homeless family who has a disabling condition who had either been continuously homeless for a year or more or who has had at least four episodes of homelessness in the past three years. To be considered homeless, persons must have been sleeping in a place not meant for human habitation (e.g., living on the streets) and/or in emergency shelter/safe haven during that time.

§12-14-29-4). There is also difficulty in obtaining Section 8 and public housing with a felony, with drug and sexual convictions presenting the most barriers. In addition, those with drug convictions are not eligible for financial aid if they want to return to school.

Those with criminal records also face an uphill battle when applying for jobs in Indiana. The release of this information can significantly hinder the likelihood a candidate with a criminal record will be called in for an interview. In the city of Indianapolis, efforts have been made to ensure that those who have served their time are given the opportunity to earn an honest wage. In April 2014, the Indianapolis City-County Council voted to adopt a measure known as “Ban the Box.” This initiative prevents vendors working with the city of Indianapolis from asking about a candidate’s criminal history during the application and first interview process (some exceptions apply).

Among those that reported a felony conviction in the 2015 Count, 89 percent were individual households and not members of families experiencing homelessness, and approximately 18 percent reported being in the foster care system as a child. Only 11 percent reported that they were employed with lost job, incarceration, and asked to leave as the primary reasons for homelessness among those with previous felony convictions.

Even with a job, securing affordable housing with a criminal background presents another obstacle in the path out of homelessness in Marion County. Most apartment complexes and other landlords require a background check before moving forward with a housing application. The Indianapolis Housing

Authority, provider of affordable housing through public housing and the Housing Choice Voucher (HVC) Program (Section 8), reserves the right to deny applicants who have been arrested or convicted of drug, theft, violent, or sex crimes within the last 10 years (Legal Action Center, 2009).

### Thoughts for Policymakers

A point-in-time count can be affected by many factors. For the unsheltered in particular, the weather will influence how and where many people will be found. Capacity is an issue in every shelter in Marion County, with 25 percent of calls to Connect2Help going unmet in 2014, and almost one thousand of these unmet calls were from families. While affordable housing and programs to address poverty are the long-term solution, in the short-term there needs to be a consideration of increasing capacity. Families are at risk of losing their children without suitable shelter, and domestic violence victims who make the difficult step of trying to leave their situation are being put on waiting lists.

In 2010, the White House and the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs announced a national initiative to end veteran homelessness by the end of 2015. The initiative has been successful nationally in reducing the number of veterans experiencing homelessness by one-third since 2010. In Indianapolis, however, the number of veterans experiencing homelessness in 2015 is higher than it has been the past five years. Most of Indianapolis’ veterans are in transitional housing; hopefully, these numbers will decline as they transition into permanent housing.

Only 11 percent of those experiencing homelessness who had a felony conviction were employed. To prevent those with felonies becoming homeless, greater resources must be dedicated to pre-release training, counseling, and education as well as reentry options. One option is transitional housing that combines a place to stay with other services, such as drug treatment and job counseling. Once an individual is experiencing homelessness, it becomes increasingly difficult to reestablish stability in housing and employment. Barriers such as transportation,

work-appropriate clothing, and showers/basic hygiene products can stand in the way of gaining employment and, subsequently, housing. Focus group research in Indianapolis has shown that many of those experiencing homelessness with a felony conviction are willing and wanting to work, but need employers to give them the opportunity to prove themselves. Additional efforts could be made to recruit employers willing to work with those who have felonies.

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*Two of the organizations providing shelter to those in need in Indianapolis – Dayspring Center and Holy Family Shelter*



# Indiana University Public Policy Institute

The IU Public Policy Institute delivers unbiased research and data-driven, objective, expert analysis to help public, private, and nonprofit sectors make important decisions that impact quality of life in Indiana and throughout the nation. A multidisciplinary institute within the IU School of Public and Environmental Affairs, we also support the Indiana Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations (IACIR) and houses the Center for Civic Literacy.

The Institute thanks the many people who volunteered and helped make the 2015 Homeless Count a success. We especially want to thank the outreach workers from the local organizations. We are grateful to Horizon House for acting as count headquarters, the IUPUI Center for Service and Learning for intern support, and the students from IUPUI's *Do the Homeless Count* service learning course for assisting with data collection. Finally, we wish to thank the Coalition for Homelessness Intervention and Prevention for their financial and technical support.

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