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Introduction

This report intends to show a picture of homelessness in Larimer County. Included in this description are a demographic profile, a listing of local services available to assist the homeless, and an indication of which resources are currently unavailable in our community.

Because the most visible of the homeless population have historically been individual men, that has become our society's definition of homeless people. In the last few years, families have been an increasing part of the equation. They are seldom "seen" because they double up with other family members and acquaintances, live in their vehicles, or keep up appearances while they camp out. There are many services available to the homeless population in Larimer County, however, waiting lists, screening criteria and location impede people's ability to access these services and slows their ability to function and/or become self-sufficient.

How Many People Experience Homelessness?

Homelessness in America has been termed a "revolving-door" crisis. Many people are able to exit homelessness quickly, but even more become homeless each day. According to the [National Coalition for the Homeless](#), it is nearly impossible to get an accurate count of the homeless so a better measure is the number of people who experience homelessness over time, rather than the number of "homeless people".

In December 2010, the U.S. Conference of Mayors produced *Hunger and Homeless Survey: a status report on hunger and homelessness in America's cities* (a 27-city survey) [[pdf](#)]. The results of this survey are based on services provided to the homeless between September 1, 2009 and August 31, 2010. Caution should be taken in extrapolating the results of this survey to the nation as a whole, but it does give a snapshot look at homelessness around the country.

Homeless Persons on Average Night

Household Type	Living on Street	Emergency Shelter	Transitional Housing
Single Adults	95%	65%	44%

Families	4%	34%	55%
Unaccompanied Minors	1%	1%	1%

As is the case nationally, it is virtually impossible to provide a definite count of homeless people in Larimer County. Some homeless travel from county to county and state to state. Some distrust "the system" and avoid areas where people congregate, which make them difficult to count. Others are homeless for a period, and then become self-reliant or temporarily live with friends, family, or in places not set up for human habitation, such as cars. It is conservatively estimated that annually about [1 percent](#) of the total U.S. population experiences homelessness, and approximately 39% of those are children. In 2011, that would equate to approximately 3,066 Larimer County residents, 1,196 of them children.

In 2010:

- A March 2010 PIT study, conducted by Homeward 2020, found an estimated 518 homeless people in Fort Collins along with an additional 617 people at risk of homelessness;
- Of the homeless identified in the 2010 PIT, 31% were couch surfing, 18% were in emergency shelters, and 10% were unsheltered. The plurality (43%) were homeless because they either lost a job or couldn't find employment. Additionally, more than 50% of the homeless in Fort Collins were households with children;
- Catholic Charities Northern (The Mission, one of two overnight shelters in Larimer County) provided shelter for 318 single individuals and 35 families between July 1, 2010 and June 30, 2011. An overflow shelter provided shelter to an estimated additional 125 people between January and April 2011;
- The Sister Mary Alice Murphy Center for Hope in Fort Collins provided assistance to 2,459 unduplicated homeless or near homeless individuals;
- Crossroads Safehouse, (the only domestic violence shelter in the county) provided 322 women and children with shelter;
- The Hand Up Cooperative helped 52 homeless individuals gain employment – 63% of which gained or maintained housing after 6 months;
- Loveland's Angel House Interfaith Hospitality Network served 57 individuals (16 families) and provided 4,332 bed nights;
- In Loveland, 126 people received day shelter at the inclement weather day shelter between November 2009 and March 2010;
- The Homelessness Prevention Initiative (HPI) provided emergency rental assistance to more than 900 households (representing 2,485 individuals including more than 1,000 children) at imminent risk of eviction;
- The House of Neighborly Service in Loveland saw an 81% increase in the number of homeless served, from 538 in 2006 to 972 in 2010; and
- There were an estimated 1,326 children in Larimer County schools that were identified as being homeless during the 2010-11 school year. This was a 22% increase over the previous year, compared to a 1% increase in the total enrollment.

What Causes Homelessness?

According to the [National Coalition for the Homeless](#), homelessness is most often the result of the shortage of affordable housing and an increase in the number of people living in poverty.

In 2009, more than [54.5% of Larimer County renters](#) [pdf] paid more than 30% of their income for housing (cost burdened) and nearly one-third (31.4%) of homeowners were considered cost burdened. Larimer County has also seen an alarming rise in the percentage of residents living in poverty. In 2000, [9.2% of county residents](#) were living at or below the federal poverty level, compared to an estimated 14.3% in 2010. This would translate to approximately 41,800 county residents living in poverty in 2010.

Other major factors influencing the rise in homelessness include an increase in foreclosures, the erosion of good-paying jobs, and the decline in public assistance (TANF).

Since the beginning of the recession in December 2007, there have been 5,386 [foreclosure filings](#) in Larimer County. Over the last several years, the number of [high-paying manufacturing jobs](#) in Larimer County has decreased, while the number of lower-paying jobs in retail and food service has increased. In addition, wages since 2001 have remained flat – when adjusted for inflation, the overall average weekly wage in 2001 was \$774, the same as it was in 2009.

Profile of the Chronically Homeless

According to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), persons experiencing “chronic” or long-term homelessness are generally homeless over one year or homeless three or more times over a few year period and may be living with a disability, addiction or mental illness.

In early spring 2003, as part of the data gathering process for a federal grant, a formerly homeless man volunteered to count the number of “chronically” homeless in Larimer County. He interviewed 78 individuals. The results of this survey were combined with information obtained at the severe weather day shelter, overnight shelters, and interviews with police and service workers.



Through this effort, it was estimated that 250 of Larimer County’s homeless people fit the HUD definition of “chronically” homeless. Of these, 85 percent were men, 10 percent were Hispanic, and 1 percent were Asian or other races/ethnicities (roughly the same as the Larimer County general population). The majority of the people using the severe weather day shelter in Fort Collins had been homeless for over a year. At the time of the interviews, 32% were sleeping in a homeless shelter, 9% had recently found housing, and 59% were living outside. Approximately 41% worked day labor or other part time/seasonal jobs when those opportunities were available. Only 14% were receiving government benefits or public assistance.

Shelter Services Available to the Homeless

Overnight Shelter Services

Two overnight shelters and a domestic violence shelter are available for homeless people in Larimer County, all in the city of Fort Collins. They are:

1) Catholic Charities Northern (The Mission). The Mission has the following resources and parameters:

- Residents may stay from 10 days up to a 120 days if working with a case manager in the "Levels Program";
- Services include meals, emergency services, and case management;
- Referrals are made to other agencies for permanent housing, employment, benefits, and other assistance;
- Capacity is for 18 men, 6 women, and 4 families;
- An additional 18 beds are available for veterans who are referred by the VA if specific criteria are met; and
- Monday through Friday, The Mission pairs with the Sister Mary Alice Murphy Center for Hope in providing day services between 8 am and 11:30 am. Lunch is served at The Mission at noon and day services are provided until 4 pm. The overnight shelter is open from 5 pm until 7:45 am.

2) Open Door Mission. The following resources and parameters apply:

- Capacity is 23 beds, with some family facilities;
- Services include meals and religious services; and
- Some accommodation for day shelter is available

3) Crossroads Safehouse is a shelter for those who have experienced domestic violence. The facility offers:

- Beds for women and children; and
- Residents may stay for a maximum of six weeks

Other Shelter Services

- The Loveland-Berthoud Interfaith Hospitality Network provides emergency shelter, food, and comprehensive counseling to homeless families with children. The Network engages eleven congregations of various faiths to provide overnight shelter. In addition, over 2,100 community volunteers help to provide meals in a family setting. Families stay in the Network an average of 44 days.
- Other Services. Housing Authorities are of limited help to homeless people due to the lack of housing certificates dedicated for the homeless and long waiting lists for assistance. In addition, some homeless people with mental health and drug/alcohol problems have difficulty finding acceptable and appropriate housing. Criminal records are also a factor that may screen a person out for assistance.
- Neighbor to Neighbor, a local housing agency and the Homelessness Prevention Initiative (HPI), another local non-profit agency, work to keep people in housing and avoid homelessness through rental assistance and other homeless prevention programs.

Limitations in Larimer County

Particularly within the chronically homeless population, there is a need for mental health and/or drug/alcohol services. Larimer County does not have a detoxification facility; the closest facility is located in adjacent Weld County. In 2002, Island Grove Regional

Treatment Center, the Greeley based detoxification facility, determined that 35% of its Larimer County patients were homeless.

Mental health services are somewhat more available, but current state financial cuts have significantly depleted the resources of the provider agency, Larimer Center for Mental Health (LCMH).

Medical services are provided by Salud Family Clinics, as well as emergency services at McKee and Poudre Valley Hospitals. Medical and dental services are not offered on a walk-in basis, so services are often not readily accessible to the homeless.

Conclusion

We believe there are over 3,000 homeless people in Larimer County and that at least 250 of these individuals are chronically homeless. Services available to the homeless are inadequate or inaccessible for their needs. In 2009-10, Larimer County school districts identified over 1,000 homeless students.



With the downturn in the economy, the need for emergency services (food baskets, rental assistance, utility assistance, etc.) has risen dramatically and an increased number of households were at risk of becoming homeless. In 2000, Larimer County renters paid a higher percentage of their income toward rent than the national and state figures. 42% of all Larimer County households paid 30% or more of their [income toward rent](#). When housing costs rise over 30% of household income, family and individual budgets are more and more strained, which in turn increases the possibility of becoming homeless.

Opportunities for Action and Resources

- **Learn about homelessness.** Understanding the how and why of the situations helps to dispel myths and generalities about this part of our population. There are many organizations in the country and locally that can help with your education in this matter.
 1. Locally, the Northern Front Range Continuum of Care is a group of non-profit, local, state and federal government representatives that work on homeless issues in Larimer and Weld Counties.
 2. [Homeward 2020](#) is a local non-profit organization tasked with ending homelessness by 2020.
 3. [Hand Up Cooperative](#) is a local, grass-roots organization dedicated to assisting people avoid or escape homelessness by increasing access to jobs. Hand Up offers a variety of volunteer opportunities.
 4. [The Colorado Coalition for the Homeless](#) is a Denver-based organization that provides medical and housing assistance as well as education, advocacy and services coordination.
 5. [The National Coalition for the Homeless](#) and [The Urban Institute](#) are national organizations for education and advocacy.
- **Contact your federal elected officials.** Funding for most homeless programs comes from Washington to the individual states.

- **Volunteer** at one of the local shelters or nonprofit agencies that work with our homeless. Contact [United Way 2-1-1](#) for volunteer opportunities.
- **Donate** to United Way of Larimer County. [United Way](#) funds a number of agencies in the community that serve homeless in Larimer County.