

COUNT OF HOMELESS PERSONS IN DOWNTOWN CALGARY

MAY 21, 1998

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July 1998

Count of Homeless Persons in Downtown Calgary Conducted on the Night of May 21, 1998

The City of Calgary Community and Social Development Department has completed the fourth in a series of biennial surveys of various downtown shelter and non-shelter service providers to determine the number of homeless persons who were served by such services, or observed sleeping “on the street”, on a designated night. Data is now available for the years 1992, 1994, 1996, and 1998. For the purpose of these studies, “homeless persons” are considered to be those who do not have a permanent residence to which they can return whenever they so choose.

It is important to recognize that the counts tend to underestimate the actual number of homeless persons in downtown Calgary. For example, they do not include those who stayed with friends or family on the night of the count or those who slept in vehicles or abandoned buildings where they would not have been seen. The counts do serve two very useful functions however. They provide a current “snapshot” of our homeless population, its size and characteristics. And, they enable us to examine how this population changes over time.

METHOD

The night chosen for the 1998 count was Thursday, May 21.¹ Twenty-two organizations participated in the survey including men's hostels, women's shelters, emergency services (e.g., Red Cross), police services, hospitals, and outreach services (e.g., Calgary Urban Projects Society). The number of agencies participating in the count was expanded in 1998 to include 3 new facilities (i.e., Victoria Park, Mayland Heights, and the House) and the Red Cross.² In a departure from past counts, the 1998 count also includes transitional shelter beds at the Mustard Seed, Anchorage, and Booth Centre. Inclusion of these beds better represents the reality of the shelter network in downtown Calgary today.

Participating organizations were asked to record the total number of homeless persons spending the night of May 21, 1998, in their facility or whom they had observed sleeping “on the street”. Demographics were gathered on the number of families (defined as a couple, a couple with children, or a single adult with children) and clients’

¹All four counts were taken on a week night around the third week of May.

²In addition, the 1998 count saw the loss of two agencies which had participated in the 1996 count with the closure of the General Hospital and Connection Housing.

age, sex, and social race³ (i.e., Aboriginal, Asian, Black, or Caucasian). Agencies were also asked to note their maximum capacity; the number of persons to whom shelter was refused that evening and the reason for shelter refusal; and any unusual events or circumstances which may have affected the count (e.g., inclement weather, unusual numbers, etc.). The agencies returned their results to the Community and Social Development Department's Social Research Unit where they were compiled.

RESULTS OF THE 1998 COUNT

A total of 988⁴ homeless persons was counted on the night of May 21, 1998; 138 females and 850 males (see Table 1). The majority (51.1%) of persons were males between 25 and 45 years of age (n=505). Thirty-six homeless families were in shelter that night including 17 children under the age of 6 and 20 children aged 6-12. Thirty-three youth (aged 13-17) and 119 young adults (18-24 years) were counted. Of the total, 17.1% (n=169) were between 46-55 years of age and 6.1% (n=60) were seniors 56 years or older. The majority were Caucasian (n=760, 76.9%), followed by Aboriginal persons (n=182, 18.4%), Black (n=17, 1.7%), and Asian (n=11, 1.1%) persons. The social race of 18 persons was unknown.

Table 1. Age and Sex Distribution of Homeless Persons - 1998

Age Group	Female		Male		Total	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
0	9	0.9%	8	0.8%	17	1.7%
6-12	7	0.7%	13	1.3%	20	2.0%
13-17	14	1.4%	19	1.9%	33	3.3%
18-24	29	2.9%	90	9.1%	119	12.0%
25-35	33	3.3%	223	22.6%	256	25.9%
36-45	29	2.9%	282	28.5%	311	31.5%
46-55	12	1.2%	157	15.9%	169	17.1%
56-64	1	0.1%	43	4.4%	44	4.5%
65+	3	0.3%	13	1.3%	16	1.6%
Unknown	1	0.1%	2	0.2%	3	0.3%
Total	138	14.0%	850	86.0%	988	100.0%

³The term "social race" denotes that race is a social category based on visible physical features. It is not a biological term.

⁴The total does not include 50 people housed by the Red Cross on the night of the count who were homeless as a result of fire. Nor does it include 100 people who were refused shelter that night.

It was very wet on the night of May 21, 1998, with thundershowers in the earlier part of the evening and periods of rain during the night. Temperatures were warm and seasonable. Most shelters were filled or nearly filled to capacity and a few were overflowing. Agencies reported that 90 homeless persons were refused shelter that night because the shelters were full. Another 3 persons were refused because of alcohol/drug use, 3 because of behaviour, and 4 because they fell outside the shelter's target group.

TREND ANALYSIS

In comparing the 1996 (n=615) and 1998 (n=988) counts, there has been an increase of 373 homeless persons, representing a 60.7% increase over two years (see Table 2). Part of this increase (n=155, 41.6%) is due to the fact that three new facilities participated in the 1998 count (i.e., Victoria Park, Mayland Heights, and The House). The inclusion of transitional shelter beds at the Mustard Seed, Anchorage, and Booth Centre accounts for another 26.8% (n=100) of the increase. The remaining increase (n=118, 31.6%) represents an overall increase in the number of homeless persons counted by agencies which had previously participated in the count in 1996. Of note, Calgary Police Service reported that 25 homeless persons spent the night of May 21, 1998, in their holding cells whereas they had counted only 9 persons in 1996. The Police Service reported being very busy for several weeks prior to the count and that the number reported (n=25) was typical.

Women and girls made up 14% (n=138) of homeless persons counted in 1998, down from 24% (n=147) in 1996 (see Table 3). Although the number of young females aged 0-24 years remains unchanged since 1996 (n=59), as a segment of the homeless population, this group has declined by 3.6% accounting for most (85.7%) of the 4.2% decrease in the 0-24 age group. The number of homeless women aged 25-64 declined by 13.8% (n=12) in 1998 over 1996 while the number of men in this age group increased by 91.1% (n=336). Males in this group (age 25-64) represented 71.4% of the homeless population in 1998 and 60% in 1996; an 11.4% increase. While the number of seniors (age 65+) remained constant (n=16), as a percentage of the population, seniors declined by 1% with the portion of males in this age group decreasing by 1.1%.

The number of homeless families in shelters increased by 28.6% in 1998 (n=36) over 1996 (n=28). Compared to 1994 (n=24), 50% more families were counted in 1998. An increasing percentage of these families were housed in women's shelters (50% in 1994, 64.3% in 1996, and 75% in 1998).

With respect to observed social race (see Table 4), Caucasian persons made up a larger proportion of the homeless population in 1998 (76.9%) than in 1996 (72.8%) or

1994 (71.8%) while the percentage of Aboriginal persons fell slightly from 19.7% (1996) to 18.4% (1998). There was a decrease in the number of Asian persons counted in 1998 (n=11, 1.1%) compared to 1996 (n=19, 3.1%). Black persons also made up a smaller proportion of the homeless population in 1998 (2.9% in 1996 and 1.7% in 1998).

Table 2. Number of Homeless Persons Counted by Surveyed Agencies, 1992, 1994, 1996, and 1998

Agencies	Number of Persons			
General Shelters	1992	1994	1996	1998
Alberta Safe House Society	4	8	8	10
Avenue 15	13	15	16	10
Calgary Alpha House Society**	26	41	50	82
Calgary Drop-In Centre	120	110	182	139
Centre 110 (Victoria Park)	-	-	-	54
Centre 111 (Mayland Heights)	-	-	-	88
Connection Housing***	-	-	18	-
Harbour Light***	38	-	-	-
Inn from the Cold (not operating on May 21/98)	-	-	-	-
Mustard Seed	-	5	14	103
Salvation Army - Anchorage	-	-	18	62
Salvation Army - Booth Centre	139	160	176	269
Salvation Army - The House	-	-	-	13
Women's Shelters				
Calgary Native Women's Shelter	-	-	20	23
Calgary Women's Emergency Shelter	27	32	28	24
YWCA - Mary Dover House	-	-	26	8
YWCA - Sheriff King	30	21	20	25
Sub Total	397	392	576	910
Non Shelter Agencies				
AFSS - Emergency Services	2	2	0	9
Calgary Police Service	16	5	9	25
Calgary Urban Projects Society* (CUPS)	0	34	15	0
Community and Social Development* (CSD)	5	7	15	38
Foothills Hospital	-	0	0	4
General Hospital***	3	0	0	-
Holy Cross Hospital***	0	0	-	-
Latour Centre	-	3	-	-
Peter Lougheed Hospital	-	0	0	0
Red Cross	-	-	-	2
Rockyview Hospital	-	0	0	0
Sonshine Centre	24	18	-	-
Total	447	461	615	988

“-“ Indicates not included in count.

*These agencies conducted an outdoor sweep of the downtown area along the Bow River (CUPS) and through Victoria Park and Connaught (CSD).

**Alpha house admitted 82 homeless persons on the night of May 21, 1998, but not all stayed all night. 53 people were discharged in the morning and others left during the evening and night.

***These agencies are no longer in operation.

Table 3. Age and Sex of Homeless Persons, 1994, 1996, and 1998

Age Group	Sex	1994*		1996		1998	
		Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
0-24	Female	32	6.9%	59	9.6%	59	6.0%
	Male	87	18.9%	84	13.7%	130	13.2%
25-64	Female	41	8.9%	87	14.1%	75	7.6%
	Male	240	52.1%	369	60.0%	705	71.4%
65+	Female	0	0.0%	1	0.2%	3	0.3%
	Male	11	2.4%	15	2.4%	13	1.3%
Unknown	Female	2	0.4%	0	0.0%	1	0.1%
	Male	7	1.5%	0	0.0%	2	0.2%
Total	Female	75	16.3%	147	23.9%	138	14.0%
	Male	345	74.8%	468	76.1%	850	86.0%
	Both Sexes	420	91.1%	615	100.0%	988	100.0%

*N=461. Sex was not noted for 8.9% (n=41) of the persons counted in 1994.

Table 4. Observed Social Race of Persons Counted, 1994, 1996, and 1998

Race	1994		1996		1998	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
Aboriginal	101	21.9%	121	19.7%	182	18.4%
Asian	8	1.7%	19	3.1%	11	1.1%
Black	12	2.6%	18	2.9%	17	1.7%
Caucasian	331	71.8%	448	72.8%	760	76.9%
Unknown	9	2.0%	9	1.5%	18	1.8%
Total	461	100.0%	615	100.0%	988	100.0%

CONCLUSION

Findings from the 1998 count suggest that the number of homeless people in downtown Calgary is increasing, even after the effects of adding new agencies (and beds) to the count are considered. The demographic makeup of Calgary's homeless population is also changing. The proportion of Caucasian persons has increased over previous counts and there are considerably more men, aged 25-64, using emergency shelter or sleeping "on the street" than in the past. There are also more families in shelter. Most of these families are headed by women.