

WE ARE HERE! - COVER ART BY BEYON

2015 HALIFAX HOMELESS POINT IN TIME COUNT

A Survey of People Living on the Streets &
Shelters



AFFORDABLE HOUSING
ASSOCIATION OF NOVA SCOTIA

POINT IN TIME COUNT

HALIFAX REGIONAL MUNICIPALITY 2015

INTRODUCTION AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The Halifax Point in Time Count (PIT) is a one day snapshot of homelessness in our city that captures numbers and basic demographics of people staying in emergency shelters, hospitals, detox facilities, and the streets. PIT counts provide a benchmark from which to measure changes in the homeless population and assist policymakers and programme administrators in monitoring progress. On May 12th 2015, over 60 volunteers took to Halifax's streets and shelters to enumerate and survey the homeless community.

Moving forward, in 2016 Halifax will take part of the first annual national PIT using a standardized methodology to allow for comparability across the country. By aligning methods across Canada, we can examine trends that help inform solutions to support the goal of ending homelessness.

The *Halifax Point in Time Count* (PIT) would not have been possible without the generous support of many dedicated community members. First of all, we give our sincere thanks to the 183 homeless individuals who agreed to be interviewed for this year's PIT count. Thank you for trusting us with your personal information and for sharing your stories.

Special thanks to Wayne MacNaughton, whose insight and assistance were instrumental to the success of the volunteer training. We applaud the over sixty volunteers who gave so generously of their time and energy as interviewers. We extend our appreciation to Claudia Jahn for leading the PiT process, Laurie Bryson for her administrative support and attention to detail. Thanks to the PIT committee members for their guidance and support. A sincere thanks to Charlene Gagnon (PIT Researcher) who has been lending her invaluable expertise to the volunteer training, the data analysis and report writing.

We are grateful for the emergency shelter providers and many agencies across the city who participated in this year's count. Thanks to the *United Way of Halifax* for providing care packages, the City of Halifax for bus passes and kindly allowing the use of the Central Library as the base camp for the night of the count. Thanks to Pamela Harrison for providing aggregate client data and artist Beyon for providing the cover art for this report. The *Affordable Housing Association of Nova Scotia* (AHANS) would like to extend our gratitude to all of you.

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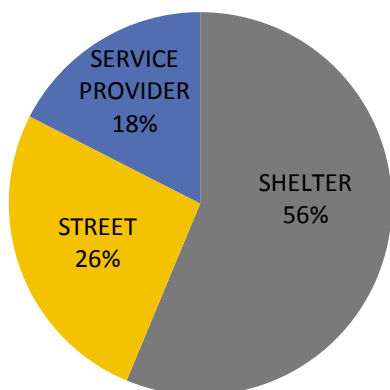
KEY FINDINGS

- In total, 284 homeless individuals were enumerated on May 11 - 183 in the shelters, 48 on the streets, 32 at non-profit service locations and 21 in the public health system. Of those 284 people, 183 participated in the survey, for a response rate of 64%
- 67% of those surveyed identified as male, 28% as female, 2% identified as transgender and 2% did not disclose their gender
- The youngest survey participant was 17 years old, and the oldest was 70; the majority of participants (31%) were under 25 years old
- The average age of men interviewed was 37 years old, compared to the average age of women at 32 years old, and the average age of those who identified as transgender at 26 years old
- 18% of those surveyed indicated that they had Aboriginal or Métis status
- When asked about all the places they slept in the past 30 days: 68% had used an emergency shelter at least once; 45% had stayed with friends or family; 34% slept rough, either outside or in a public place; 14% had spent the night in jail and 11% had an overnight stay in the hospital
- 62% had been without a permanent address for less than a year, and 31% for more than a year
- 32% indicated that their last permanent address was somewhere other than HRM
- The main reason people left their last permanent address 22% said that it was due to loss of employment or other financial issues, 20% said it was due to domestic (spousal or parental) violence or family breakdown, 19% said it was due to unsafe or unhealthy housing conditions such as too much drug or alcohol abuse and slum conditions, 14% said they got kicked out for non-financial reasons, and 11% because of criminal justice issues
- 54% indicated they had mental health issues, 52% said they were struggling with addictions, 42% said they had medical conditions like high blood pressure, asthma and diabetes, and 18% said they had physical disabilities

WHO ARE HALIFAX'S HOMELESS?

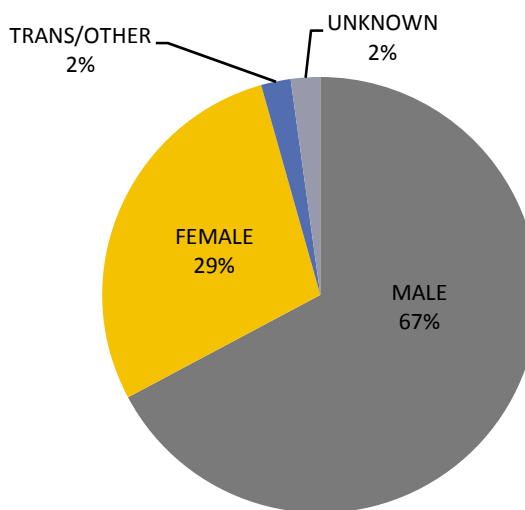
The people interviewed were from a variety of backgrounds. They were young and old, men and women, who were both born here and came from away. All percentages in this section are based on a sample size of 183 survey participants.

FIGURE 1 - SURVEY LOCATION



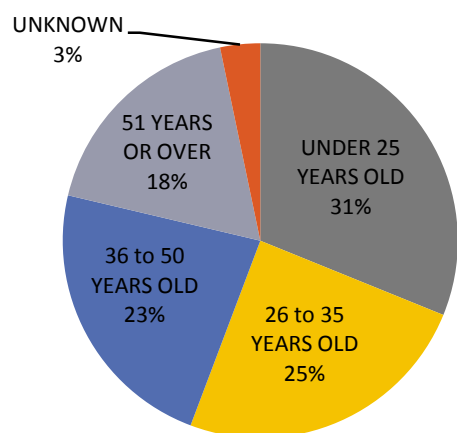
In total we talked to 183 individuals who did not have a permanent address or place to sleep on the day they were interviewed. We talked to 103 people in the shelters (56%), 48 people on the street (26%), and 32 people at service provider locations. For a full list of shelter and service locations we visited, see the methodology.

FIGURE 2 - GENDER IDENTITY



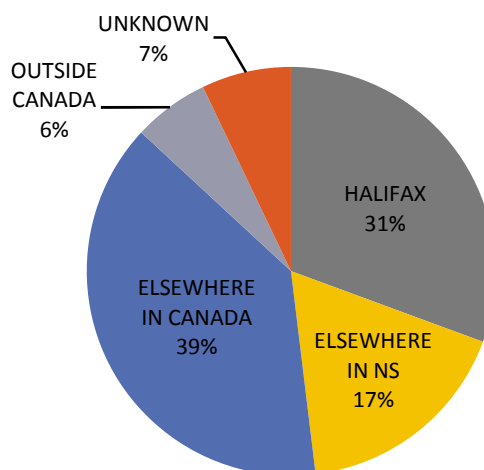
When asked how they gender identified, 67% of those surveyed identified as male, 28% as female, 2% identified as transgender and 2% did not disclose their gender.

FIGURE 3 - AGE



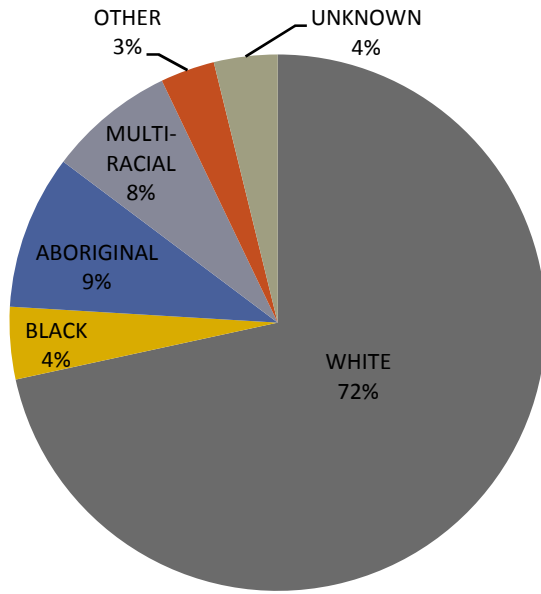
The youngest survey participant was 17 years old, and the oldest was 70. The majority of those surveyed (31%) were 25 years old or younger; 25% were between the ages of 26 and 35, 23% were between the ages of 36 and 50, 18% were aged 51 or older, and 3% of did not disclose their age.

FIGURE 4 - PLACE OF BIRTH



The majority of participants in this survey (49%) were born in Nova Scotia; 31% in Halifax and 18% in rural NS. Thirty-nine percent were born elsewhere in Canada and 6% were born outside of Canada. Seven percent did not disclose where they were born.

FIGURE 5 - RACIAL IDENTITY

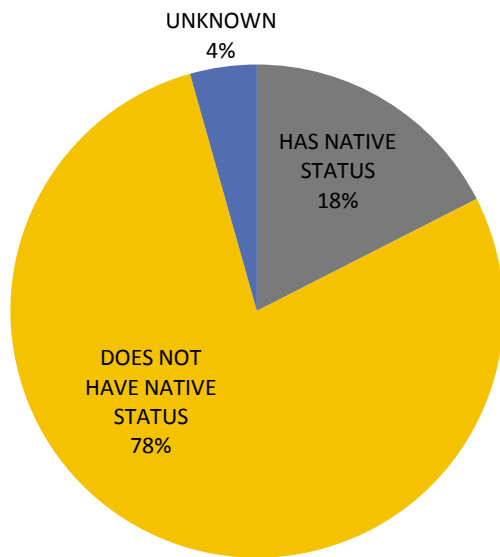


When survey participants were asked about their racial identity, 72% identified as white, 4% identified as black, 8% as bi-racial or of mixed race, 3% as another race not indicated and the racial identification of 4% was undisclosed.

While only 9% of participants identified as Aboriginal when asked to self-identify, 18% of participants indicated that they had Native or Métis status when asked that specific question directly.

Of those who indicated they had Native or Métis status (n=32), only 48% also identified as being aboriginal; while 29% identified as white, 7% as black, 13% identified as being bi-racial 3% said they were an “other” race.

FIGURE 6 - NATIVE OR METIS STATUS



No transgendered people interviewed identified as being white; half identified as Aboriginal, and half identified as being multi-racial or of another racial identity. No women interviewed identified as being black compared to 8% of the men in the sample. 82% of the women interviewed identified as being white, compared to 73% of the men interviewed.

FIGURE 7 - GENDER IDENTITY BY RACIAL IDENTITY

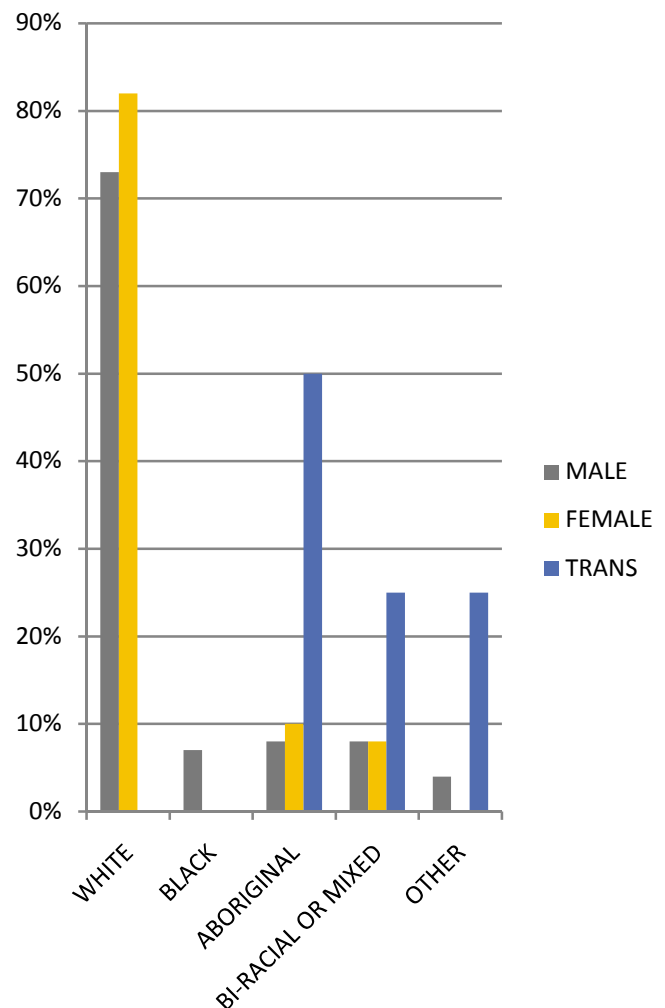
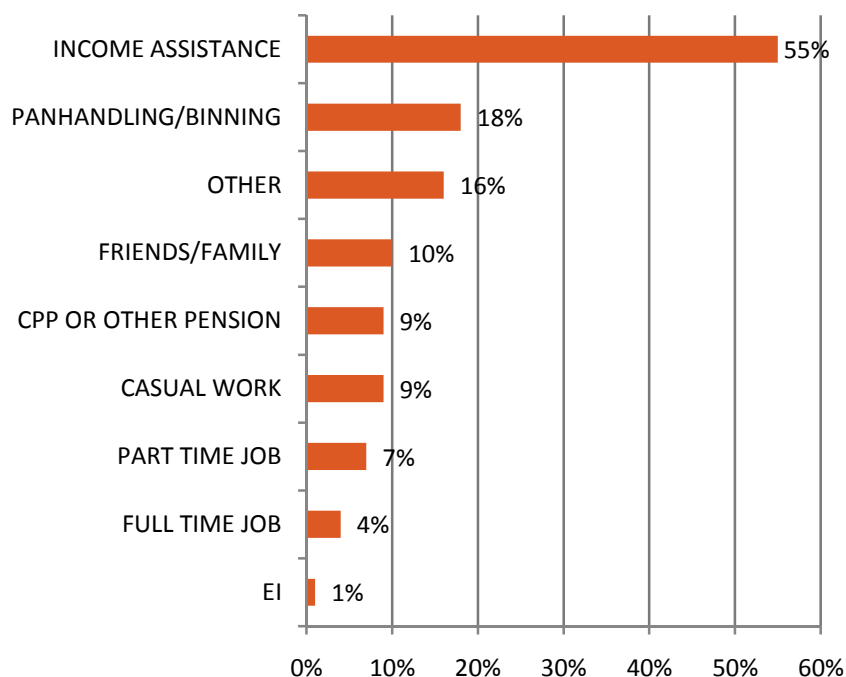


FIGURE 8 - INCOME SOURCES



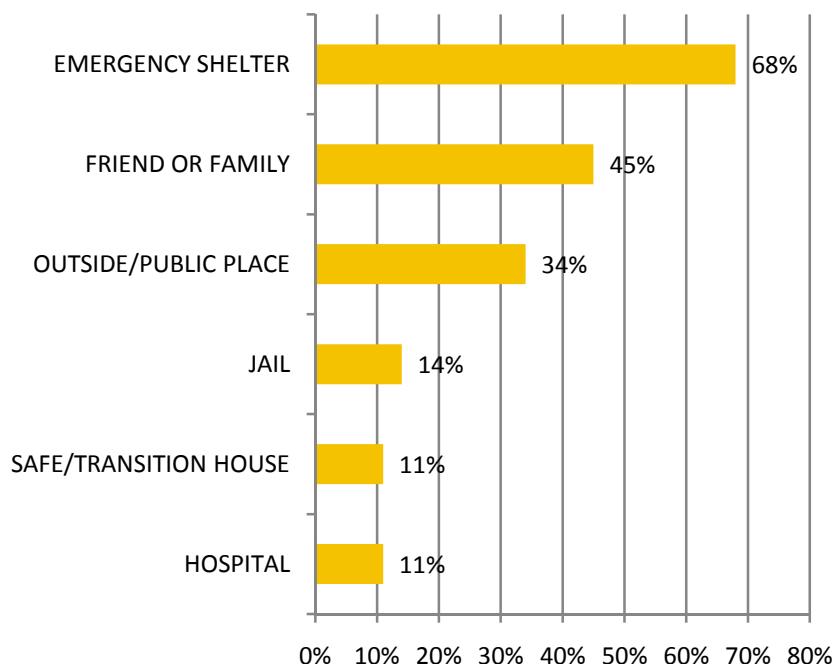
When asked about all the places they got their money from, 55% of participants indicated that they received an Income Assistance cheque. Panhandling and binning (collecting bottles from garbage bins) was the second most frequent source of income, with 18% indicating this as an income source. “Other” income sources for participants included sex work, scrap metal collection, and petty theft.



SLEEPING ARRANGEMENTS

10%
Had served in the
Armed Forces

FIGURE 9 – WHERE HAVE YOU SLEPT IN THE PAST 30 DAYS?

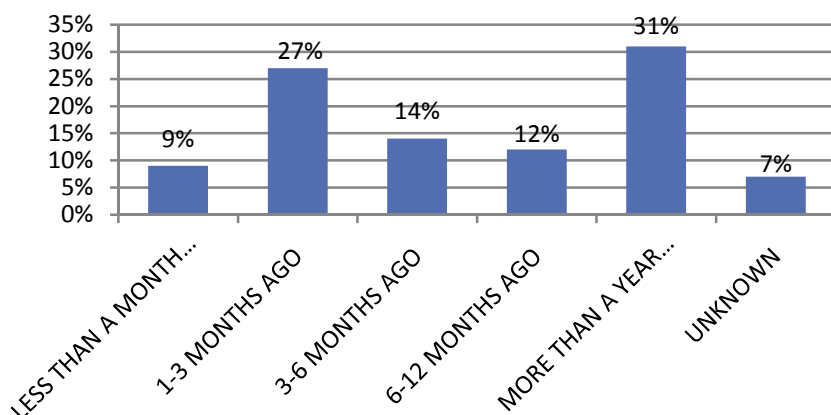


Participants were asked to tell us about all the places they slept in the 30 days prior to being interviewed.

The majority (68%) had used an emergency shelter at least once in the previous 30 days; 45% had stayed with friends or family. 34% slept rough, either outside or in a public place. Fourteen percent indicated that they had spent the night in jail at least once in the past 30 days, and 11% had an overnight stay in the hospital.

LAST PERMANENT ADDRESS

FIGURE 10—WHEN WAS LAST TIME YOU HAD A PERMANENT ADDRESS



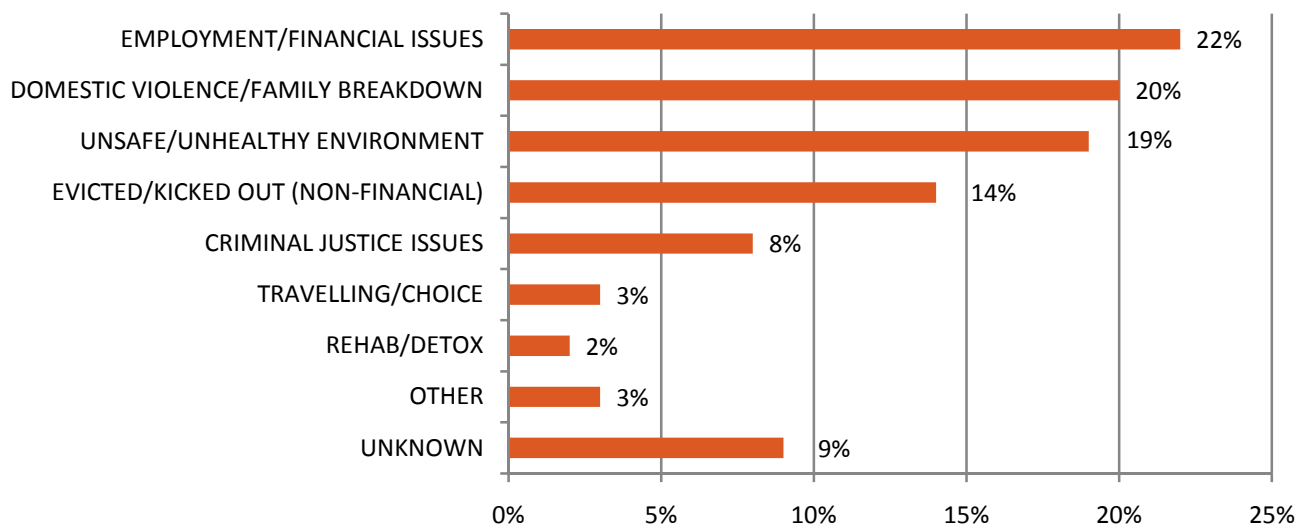
Participants were asked about their last permanent address.

Figure 9 shows a detailed breakdown of the length of time participants have been without a permanent address; 62% had been without a permanent address for less than a year, and 31% for more than a year.

When asked about the location of their last permanent address, 32% indicated that it was somewhere other than Halifax, which means they moved to Halifax and had not found a place to live. Of those whose last permanent address was not Halifax (n=59), the majority, 39%, came from a variety of locations in rural Nova Scotia; 14% came from Ontario, 12% from New Brunswick, 10% from Alberta, 9% from Newfoundland, 7% from Quebec, and less than 5% from British Columbia, PEI, and the United States.

32%
Said their last
permanent address
was NOT in Halifax

FIGURE 11 – WHY DID YOU LEAVE YOUR LAST PERMANENT ADDRESS

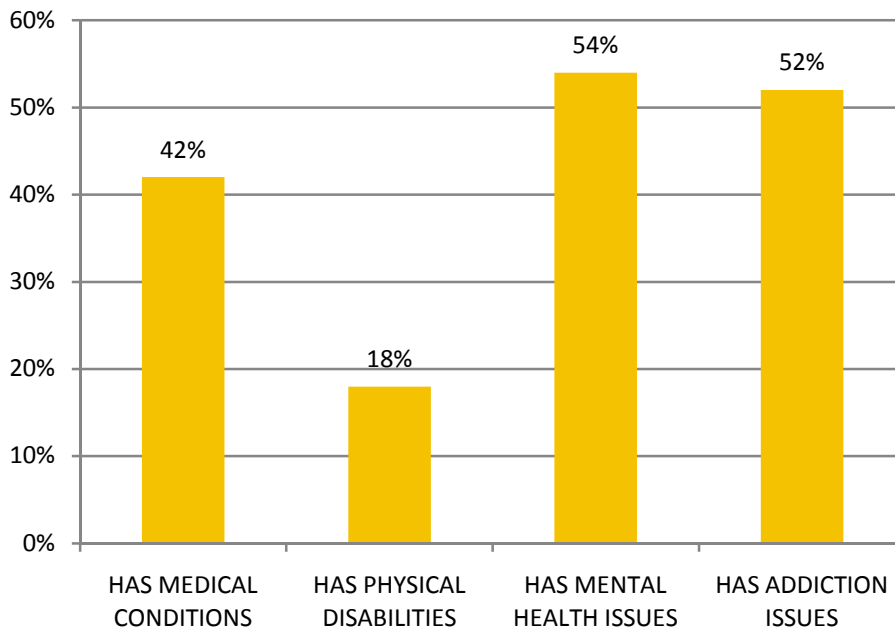


The reasons people left their last permanent address were multi-faceted. When asked to indicate the main (singular) reason they left, most said that it was due to loss of employment or other financial issues (22%).

Other reasons for leaving included domestic (spousal or parental) violence and family breakdown (20%), unsafe or unhealthy housing conditions such as too much drug or alcohol abuse and slum conditions (19%), getting kicked out for non-financial reasons (14%), criminal justice issues (8%), going into rehab or detox (2%) and other non-categorized or unknown reasons (11%). Only 3% of participants indicated that they chose to leave their last permanent address because they wanted to travel, or preferred to live on the streets.

HEALTH STATUS AND SERVICE ACCESS

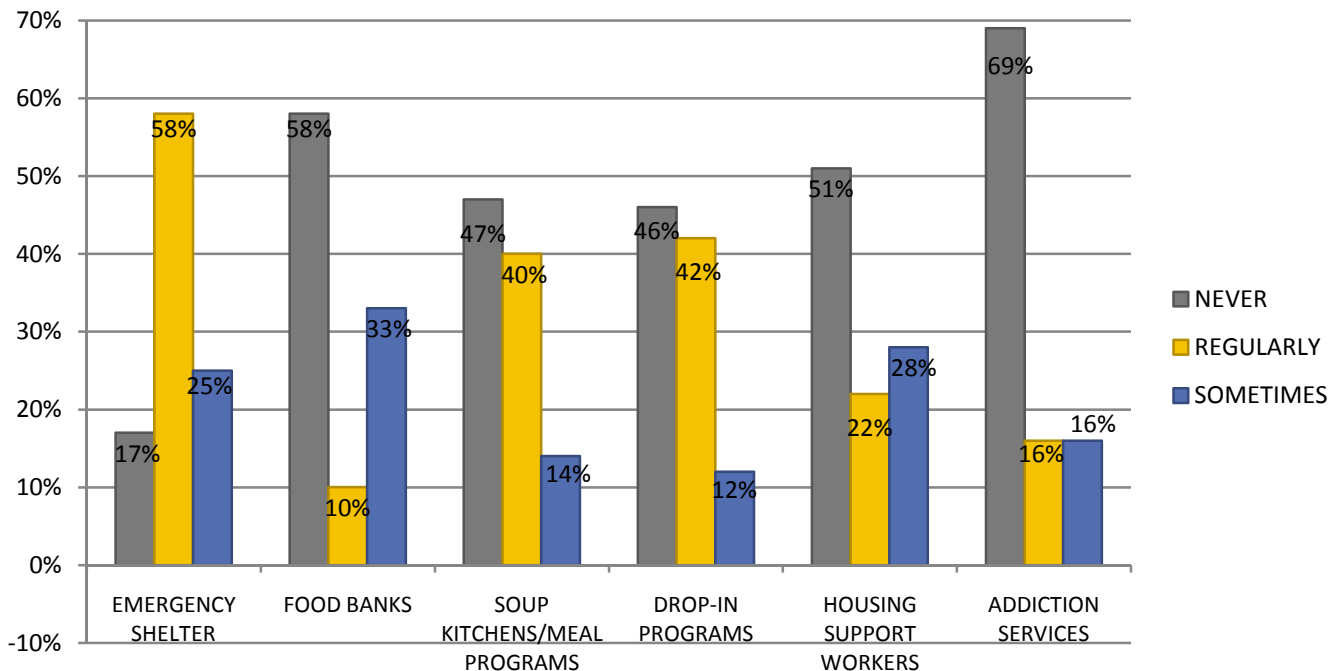
FIGURE 12 – DO YOU HAVE ANY HEALTH ISSUES?



Participants were asked about the various dimensions of their health status; 54% indicated they had mental health issues, 52% said they were struggling with addictions, 42% said they had medical conditions like high blood pressure, asthma and diabetes, and 18% said they had physical disabilities.

When participants were asked how often they accessed services offered in the community, 17% indicated they never accessed emergency shelter services, 58% said they regularly accessed emergency shelter services and 25% said they would use emergency shelter services sometimes. Most participants said that they never used the variety of other services available in the city. Figure 1 shows the breakdown of service use among participants.

FIGURE 13 – HOW OFTEN DO YOU ACCESS THE FOLLOWING SERVICES?



DIFFERENCES IN HOW PEOPLE EXPERIENCE HOMELESSNESS

Certain factors, such as gender, age and native status, can affect how people experience homelessness. This section explores those differences for this sample.

The average age of men interviewed was 37 years old, compared to the average age of women at 32 years old, and the average age of those who identified as transgender at 26 years old.

As shown in Figure 14, 40% of all male participants had been homeless for more than a year, compared to 22% of female participants, and 33% of participants who identified as transgender. This pattern reflects a commonly held belief that men are overrepresented in the hard to house population. Further analyses and more data would be required to explore why this is.

The average age of those who had been homeless for less than a year was 34 years old, compared to 37 years old for those who had been homeless more than a year.

FIGURE 14 – LENGTH OF TIME HOMELESS BY GENDER

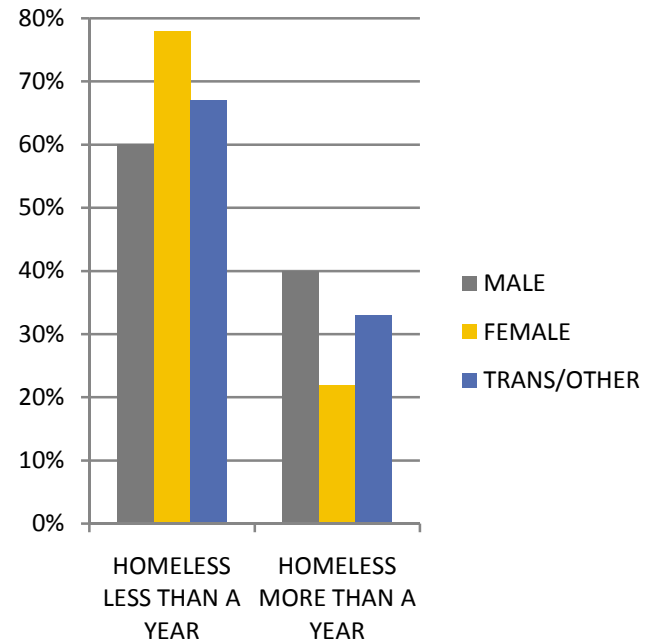


FIGURE 15 – PLACES SLEPT IN PAST 30 DAYS BY GENDER

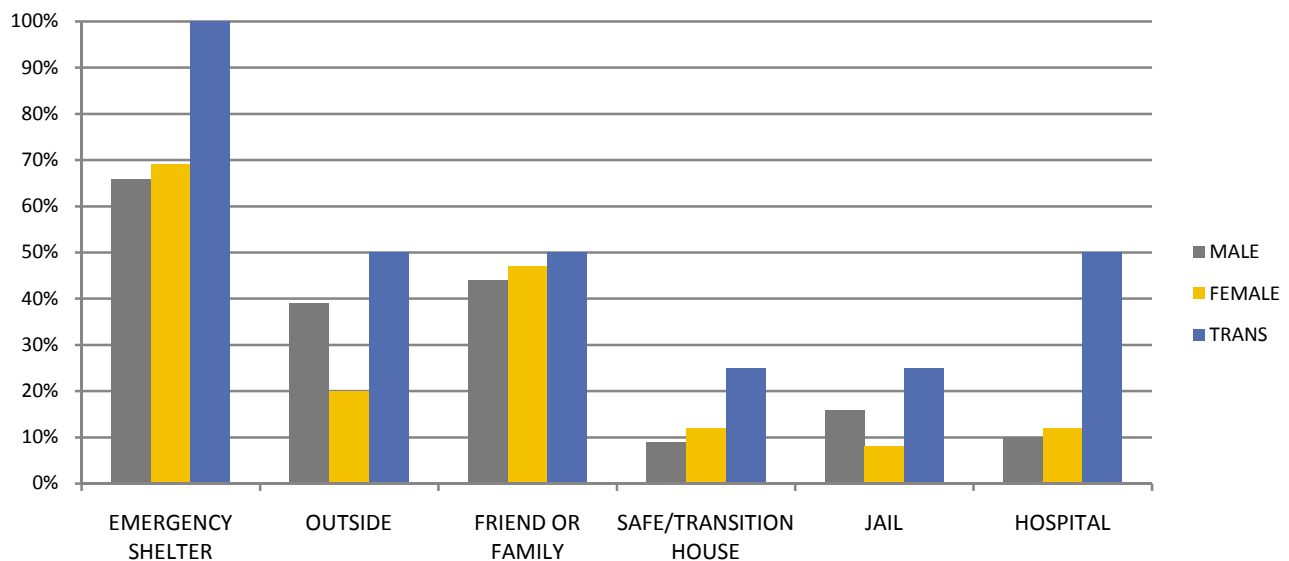
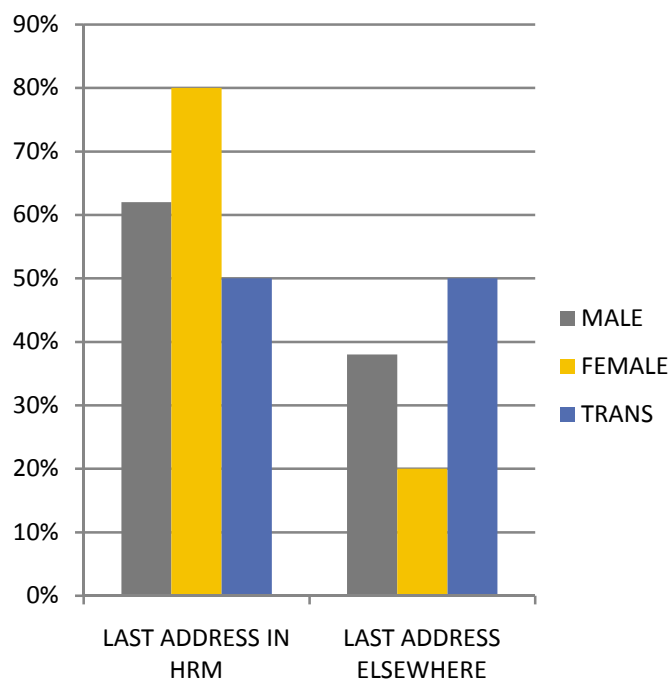


Figure 15 shows the differences in where men, women and transgendered people slept in the 30 days prior to being surveyed. As shown, 100% of those who identified as transgendered used emergency shelters. Further, a higher proportion of men (59%) and transgendered (50%) participants slept outside than women (20%). The average age of those who reported sleeping at friends and family in the past 30 days was 32 years old, compared to the average age of 38 years old for those who did not. For those who slept outside the average age was 33 years old compared to the average age of 36 years old for those who did not.

These were the only notable age differences seen among age and places slept in past 30 days.

FIGURE 16 – PLACE OF LAST PERMANENT ADDRESS BY GENDER



Of the women interviewed, 80% indicated that their last permanent address was somewhere in HRM, compared to 62% of men and 50% of transgendered people.

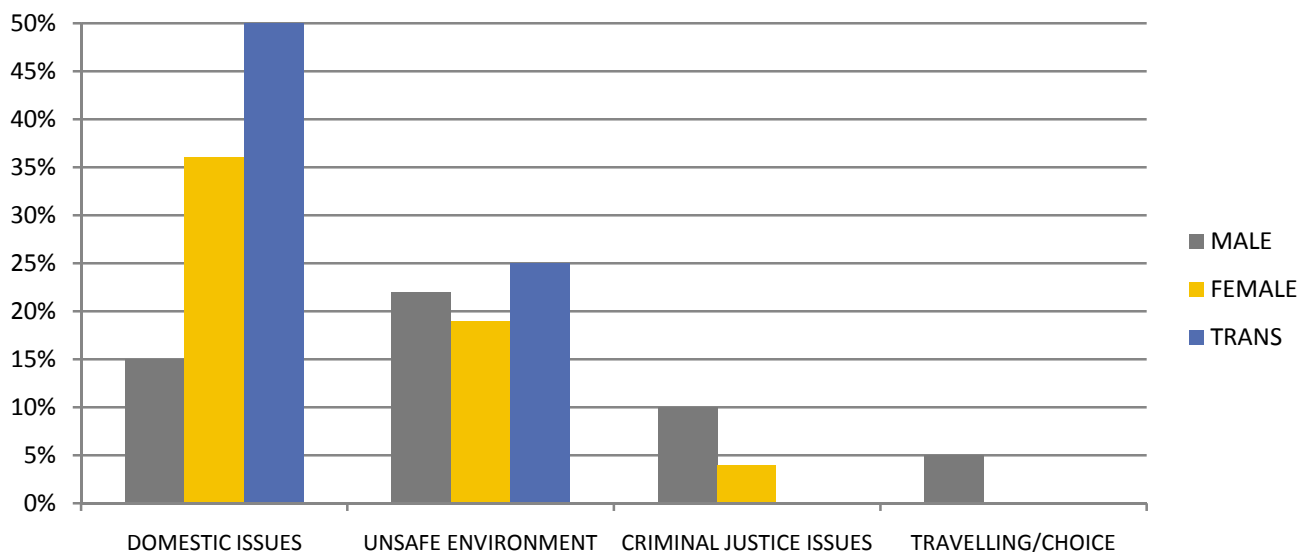
For the 38% of the men interviewed who came to HRM from elsewhere, many reported that they were coming home to the Atlantic Provinces from Alberta due to being laid off; as well as coming from Newfoundland and other Atlantic Provinces in the hope of find employment in Halifax.

The average age of people whose last permanent address was elsewhere in Canada was 32 years old, compared to an average age of 37 coming from elsewhere in NS and 38 years old for those within Halifax and coming from outside of Canada.

The reasons why men, women and transgendered individuals left their last permanent address was varied, however, there were notable differences for those who left households because of violent and non-violent domestic issues, who were living in unsafe environments, those who were dealing with criminal justice issues and those who indicated their homelessness (or a nomadic lifestyle) was a choice.

The highest proportion of people leaving households due to domestic issues was reported by transgendered individuals (50%), compared to 36% of women and only 15% of men. For men, 10% said they lost housing due to criminal justice issues compared to less than 5% of women and 0 transgendered individuals. And only men in the sample (5%) indicated they left their last address by choice or because they wanted to live a nomadic lifestyle

FIGURE 17 – REASON FOR LEAVING LAST PERMANENT ADDRESS BY GENDER



Men interviewed reported more medical conditions (50%), physical disabilities (23%) and addiction issues (60%) than women. And women reported more mental health issues than men; 63% compared to 54%. All of the transgendered people in the sample reported mental health issues, however none reported physical disabilities. Half of the transgendered people interviewed reported addiction issues, and 75% said they had medical conditions.

As shown in Table 1, the average age of those with physical disabilities and medical conditions were older than those without physical disabilities and medical conditions. For those who reported mental health issues, the average age was 6 years younger than those without mental health issues; 33 years old compared to 39 years old.

FIGURE 18 – HEALTH STATUS BY GENDER

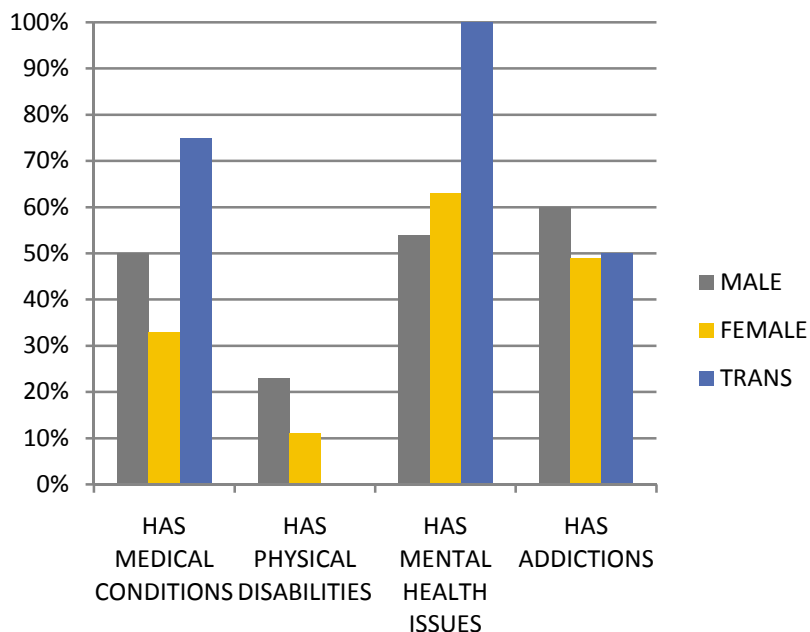
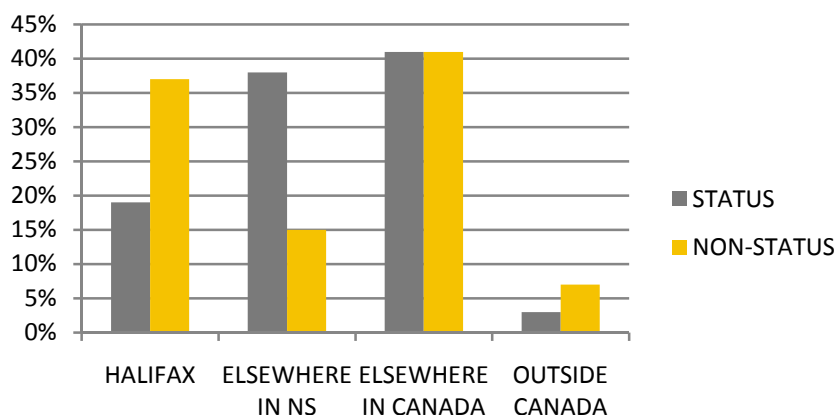


TABLE 1 – HEALTH STATUS BY AVERAGE AGE

	YES	NO
MEDICAL CONDITIONS	39 YEARS	32 YEARS
PHYSICAL DISABILITIES	41 YEARS	34 YEARS
MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES	33 YEARS	39 YEARS
ADDICTIONS	34 YEARS	36 YEARS

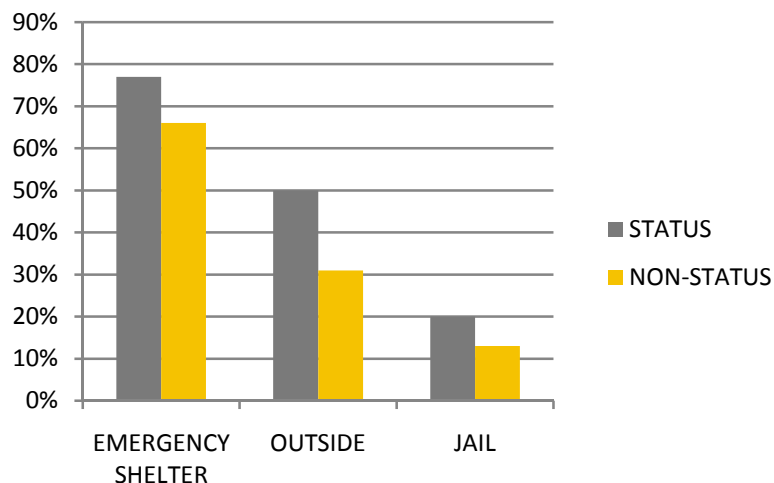
In total, 175 participants responded to the question specifically dealing with Native and/or Métis Status; 18% (32 people) indicated that they held Native Status as defined by the Government of Canada. There was no difference in average age of those with status compared to those without status; both groups had an average age of 35 years old. There were virtually no differences between those with Native status and length of time homeless, with 34% of non-status participants being homeless more than a year, compared to 36% of those with native status.

FIGURE 19 – PLACE OF LAST PERMANENT ADDRESS BY NATIVE STATUS



As shown in Figure 19, a higher proportion of those with Native Status were born elsewhere in Nova Scotia (38%) than those without Native Status (15%). This pattern may indicate a migration of those who were living in rural Nova Scotia and on reserves to the city where more services and potential employment are available.

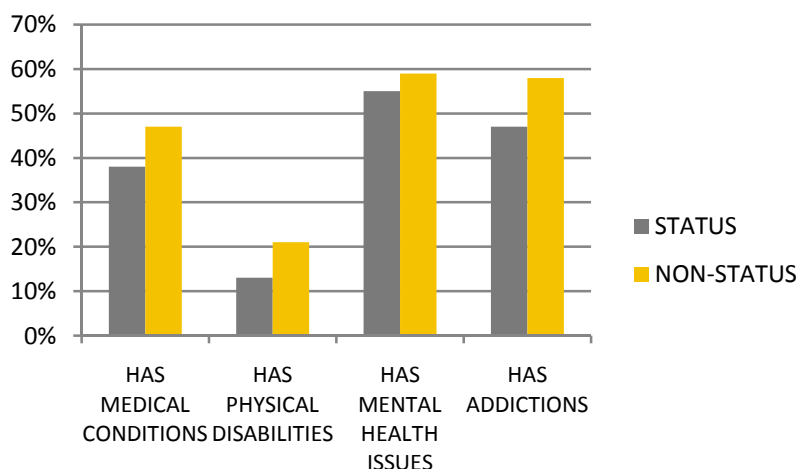
FIGURE 20 – PLACES SLEPT IN PAST 30 DAYS BY NATIVE STATUS



As shown in Figure 20, a higher proportion of those with Native Status slept in an emergency shelter, outside and in jail, than those without Native Status.

Interestingly, a lower proportion of those with Native status reported health issues along all health dimensions than those without Native Status as shown in Figure 21.

FIGURE 21 – HEALTH STATUS BY NATIVE STATUS



Although these analyses should not be generalized to the whole of the homeless population for reasons highlighted in the Limitations section of the Methodology, they are useful guideposts for further, more in-depth analysis. For this sample, a participant's gender, age and Native Status interacted with and changed how they experienced homelessness in HRM.

MY NOTES:

METHODOLOGY

Planning and organization of the 2015 Halifax Point in Time Count began in January 2015. The organizing committee was led by AHANS and consisted of 10 stakeholders from a variety of non-profit and government agencies. Independent researcher, Charlene Gagnon, was contracted to design the survey, and handle all aspects of data management and collection. The original date of the Count was set to be Tuesday March 24, however a series of significant snowstorms pushed the date to Tuesday May 12.

The survey was designed with reference to previous street counts that had occurred in Halifax in 2005, and Calgary and Vancouver in 2014. It consisted of 3 pre-screening questions and 23 quantitative questions identified as important and comparable variables by the committee, and was designed to be short and easy to administer. There were two surveys created; one to administer on the street, and one in the shelters. The only difference between these surveys was the pre-screening questions. In addition to the committee, an original draft of the survey was shown to those who could offer a first voice perspective, to ensure that language was appropriate and response categories were inclusive.

Street Count

Volunteers to administer the surveys for the street count were recruited online and came from a variety of backgrounds. Two training sessions were held at the JBO Centre on Tuesday May 5, and Thursday May 7 in the evening. The training module was 2 hours long and was facilitated by Claudia Jahn (to explain the purpose of data collection); Wayne McNaughton (to discuss how to treat participants with dignity); and Charlene Gagnon and her assistant Geoff Matheson (to discuss how to ask the questions and interpret responses).

Volunteers were instructed to approach everyone they encountered on the street the night of the count, even those who did not appear to be homeless, and keep a tally of the number of people they asked the pre-screening questions to; however they were only to administer the survey to those who indicated that they did not have a place to sleep the previous night where they had paid rent for that shelter.

Volunteers were instructed to ask the questions as if they were interview questions, not multiple choice, and to select the appropriate responses given. If volunteers were uncertain on how to record responses, they were asked to probe further, or read the list of possible responses to the participant before they made their selection. During the training session, every question on the survey was reviewed to ensure that volunteers were clear about what they were asking, with role playing to discuss some challenges they may face in their data collection. Volunteers were told that every question on the survey was voluntary; if participants weren't comfortable answering specific questions, they could be left blank.

The Central Library was used as a basecamp and volunteers were divided into teams of two and three, with at least one member of each team having previous experience working with the homeless population, and dispatched to one of 10 predetermined zones in the Halifax/Dartmouth urban core area. There was also one mobile survey team of service providers who drove around to hidden areas where their clients were known to hang out and sleep rough.

The night of the count was mild and foggy. All teams indicated that there were not many people out on the streets, especially on the Dartmouth side of the harbour. Closure of the bridge was thought to be the main factor of this in Dartmouth. In total 48 people were identified as homeless on the streets, and surveyed.

Shelter Count

Shelter surveys were delivered to service providers in advance of the Street Count date. They were instructed to administer the survey on May 11, 2015, however due to a number of factors, the majority of participants were surveyed in these locations after that date.

Survey administrators within the shelters and service locations were not in attendance of the volunteer training sessions, and were given basic instructions on how to conduct the surveys.

According to Homelessness Individuals and Families Information System (HIFIS), 183 individuals stayed in a shelter on May 12. Of those 183 individuals, 103 eligible participants were surveyed in 6 shelters. Further, 32 people were surveyed at 6 non-profit service locations between May 11 to May 13.

The shelters and non-profit service providers where we interviewed the people included in this analysis were:

Survey Location	#
METRO TURNING POINT	23
BARRY HOUSE	13
SALVATION ARMY	29
ARK	8
BASILICA	5
SOULS HARBOUR	1
D180	2
PHOENIX YOUTH SHELTER	19
BRYONY HOUSE	8
MAINLINE	6
MARGUERITE CENTER	4
ADSUM HOUSE	11

Limitations

Despite the training and instructions, a number of people were surveyed who did not fit the definition of homeless set out in this Street Count. In total, 43 surveys were not included in this analysis, as those participants indicated that they were marginally housed in a place where they paid rent the night before they were surveyed. The evening bridge closure affected and limited travel between Halifax and Dartmouth.

In terms of data limitations, it is important to note that this analysis represents a Point In Time Snapshot from the sample collected. The authors caution against generalization of these results to the whole homeless population in Halifax. For such generalizations to be made, we would need a much larger sample that included both homeless and housed individuals. Further, there is usually so much variance within the homeless population; it is difficult to determine whether or not this sample represents a normal distribution. The comparative analyses conducted on the data are meant to provide insight into the makeup of this sample, the 183 people who shared their stories with us.