

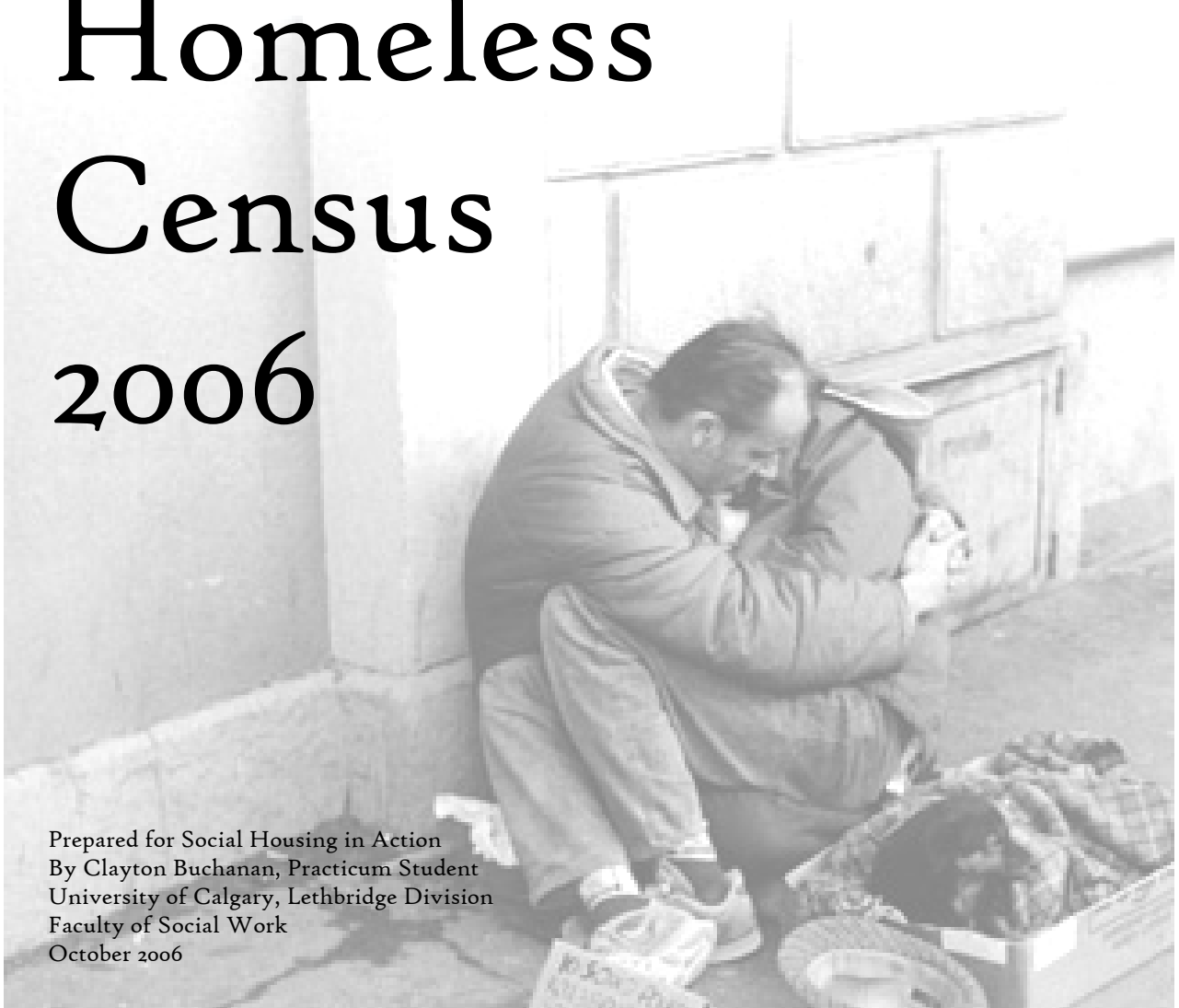
S.H.I.A.  
SOCIAL HOUSING IN ACTION



• "Bringing  
Lethbridge Home"

# Lethbridge Homeless Census 2006

Prepared for Social Housing in Action  
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***“The very definition of insanity is to keep doing the same things over and over again, expecting different results”***

Philip Mangano, Executive Director of the United States Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH) quoting Alfred Einstein

## **Acknowledgements**

The Social Housing in Action Committee and the City of Lethbridge would like to thank and recognize the support of everyone who committed their time and energy for the third annual Homeless Census for the City of Lethbridge. Without the collaborative effort of these individuals and agencies, this project would not have been possible.

The Service providers that donated time and volunteered to complete the Census within their agencies and “On the Street” were: YWCA Outreach and Harbour House, Lethbridge Shelter and Resource Centre, Native Women’s Transition Home, Lethbridge Regional Hospital Emergency, Canadian Mental Health Crisis Beds, TRAC Youth Outreach, and Wood’s Homes Youth Shelter. We appreciate your on-going commitment to addressing the issue of homelessness in our city.

We would also like to thank the various organizations that provided information to this project: Laura House, Parkside Homes, Streets Alive, Sifton Family and Youth Services, St. Vincent De Paul, Lethbridge Housing Authority, and Treaty 7 Urban Housing Authority. Your input and expertise has been an invaluable contribution to this project.

We would also like to extend our deepest gratitude to the 84 volunteer street enumerators who brought their time, energy, and enthusiasm and expertise to this project. We are once again overwhelmed with the growing community support that is shown by the ever-increasing number of volunteers. The Homeless Census would not be possible without the support of these individuals from our community.

Many thanks to the Social Housing in Action Committee’s Research and Structure Subcommittee for annually designing and implementing this important study on the issue of homelessness in Lethbridge.

### ***For their time and efforts, a special thank you to:***

Cst. Blaine Stodolka, Lethbridge City Police, for volunteering to talk about safety at the volunteer orientation and take on the role of rover during the Census, and help identify key areas for map zones.

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Mayor Bob Tarleck, Dr. Gary Bowie, and Alderman Barbara Lacey for their inspirational and informational speeches at the volunteer orientation.

## **Foreword**

By Suzanne Petryshyn

During the Homeless Census 2006, it became vividly clear that the face of homelessness is evolving and changing, yet it remains a static entity in our community. Homelessness, is a concept that citizens of the City of Lethbridge have worked together to address for a number of years. In recent years, the Homeless Counts' of 2004 and 2005, and the Homeless Census 2006 have facilitated, through the dedicated community members who invest their time, an attempt to identify what homelessness looks like in our community. Through the delivery of social programs, citizens of the city of Lethbridge continue to contribute toward making a difference for all members of the community – homeless or not.

The experience of these volunteers was captured in a discussion immediately following the Homeless Census 2006. This discussion focused on one volunteer expressing the harsh reality of homelessness that was experienced first-hand by her on the evening of the Census. The reality of homelessness comes in the fact that it is an issue that remains inclusive to people from all walks of life. Homelessness is present in families with infants and small children. Homelessness is present with individuals who are employed full time. Homelessness is an issue youth face. Homelessness is present with individuals who are attending post secondary institutes in an attempt to further their education. Homelessness is present with individuals who are faced with health related issues. Homelessness does not discriminate based on ethnicity, race, religion, age and/or gender.

### ***A Story...***

The volunteer indicated she came across a very troublesome scene during the Census. The homeless population of Lethbridge has a face, a name and a family of origin. On the evening of the 2006 Census, she and her team of volunteers were walking through a city park when they discovered a family of three. All adults, the family consisted of two siblings and one of their spouses'. After the introductions were made and the Census volunteers' shared their role, the family of three invited the group to sit down and join them by the fire they had made to keep warm. The volunteers accepted the invitation, and after completing the Homeless Census 2006 survey, they remained by the fire with the family and discussed the issue of homelessness.

The volunteer who shared this experience expressed her inability to comprehend how one of our community members, let alone an entire family, could be faced with a situation that left them with the only available option for shelter- a park; an open fire the only option for warmth. The emotional exchange came as an expression of helplessness in the ability to provide any assistance to make a difference. The volunteer felt she had offered her time to volunteer for what she believes is valuable and necessary in our community. However, she did not previously consider the reality of the experience and the experience of a face to face with homelessness.

## Table of Contents

Acknowledgements.....	i
Foreword.....	ii
Executive Summary.....	4
Introduction.....	6
Purpose.....	7
Definitions.....	8
Census Methodology.....	8
Street Count.....	9
Agency Count.....	10
2006 Census Results and Comparative Analysis.....	11
Discussion.....	15
Limitations.....	17
Volunteer Evaluations and Recommendations.....	18
Volunteer process recommendations:.....	18
Volunteer process recommendations:.....	19
Coordinator Recommendations for the Homeless Census Report:.....	19
References.....	20
Appendix A – Street and Agency Count Data Form.....	21
Appendix B – Agency Instructions – Homeless Census Questionnaire.....	22
Appendix C - Oath of Confidentiality.....	23
Appendix D – Homeless Census 2006 Orientation Agenda.....	24
Appendix E – Homeless Census Questionnaire.....	25
Appendix F – Street Team Volunteer Evaluation Sheet.....	26

## Executive Summary

The 2006 Homeless Census was conducted on October 12, 2006. The purpose of the Census is to provide comparative data to last years Homeless Count, to understand possible service gaps, and provide current data for the planning of the City of Lethbridge homeless initiative.

Although this is the 3rd annual Homeless Census, this report provides the first opportunity to conduct a comparative analysis, based on improvements from the first experience. The methodologies used in 2004 and 2005 were dissimilar in nature and could not provide for a valid comparison. Minor revisions were made to the methodology for 2006; however, these revisions are not significant enough to affect the ability to conduct a comparative analysis. These revisions include using the same data collection methodologies in both the Agency and Street Counts, revising census questions to provide data that is more comprehensive in scope and reducing the possibility of utilizing subjective data.

A noteworthy difference in the census this year is the day on which it was conducted. Due to timeline restrictions, the Census was delayed by one week, from October 6, 2005, to October 12th, 2006. This change imposes minor limitations. However, the overall time of year has remained consistent enough that results can still be comparatively analysed.

### *Key findings:*

On the evening of October 12, 2006, 26 people were counted as homeless in the Street Count. Agencies that participated in the Census included the emergency shelters and transition homes. They reported serving a combined total of 92 individuals. The Emergency Youth Shelter was operating at full capacity Count (8 beds). They also provided temporary off-site housing to 2 other children. Combined, in the Street and Agency counts, a total of 118 individuals reported living 'homeless'. In addition to this, the Street Count enumerators found increased evidence of people "sleeping rough" at 43 different locations throughout the city. There were 8 families, including 16 children, who were enumerated as 'homeless'. One religious organization in Lethbridge also reported serving a family that was sleeping in a vehicle.

In the Homeless Counts' of 2004 and 2005, research used in the analysis of the data collected hypothesized 80% of the homeless population is not visible, and therefore not accessible to the Census enumerators (Raising the Roofs, 2004). Stemming from this hypothesis, an additional 472 "hidden homeless" individuals would not have been counted in either the Street or the Agency counts. These totals represent a total estimated homeless population of 590 in Lethbridge.

A major addition to this year's Census is the inclusion of a question pertaining to an individual's ability to secure housing. The data collected from this question revealed 29%

### **QUICK FACTS ABOUT OCTOBER 12, 2006**

- 118 people were counted as being homeless
- Estimated homeless population in Lethbridge is 590
- 8 families were counted as being homeless, including 16 children

cited their inability to pay rent as their main reason for not securing a permanent, affordable residence. 21% stated the lack of rental availability as a major barrier to securing affordable housing.

Supporting evidence for these findings was gained by examining the ratio of people on waiting lists compared to the number of units available for the subsidized housing agencies (Lethbridge Housing Authority and Treaty 7 Housing). The Lethbridge Housing Authority (LHA) currently has 365 households on the waiting list, and currently provides subsidies to 1171 households. LHA provides subsidies to parents with dependant children, seniors, and individuals in need of subsidized housing (Personal communication, October 4, 2006). Treaty 7 Housing Authority currently owns and maintains a total of 165 rental properties within the Treaty 7 area (Calgary-43, Lethbridge-115, and Cardston-7). Currently, Treaty 7 Housing has a waitlist of 97 complete applicants, and 30-50 applications have not been fully completed. As such these applications cannot be placed on the waiting list (Personal communication, Jackie Blackwater, October 25, 2006).

The benefits of this project include, but are not exclusive to

- Increased education and awareness regarding the extent of homelessness in Lethbridge
- Increased understanding concerning the issues faced by people who are homeless
- Increased emphasis on anti-oppressive strategies to positively impact 'ending homelessness' in Lethbridge

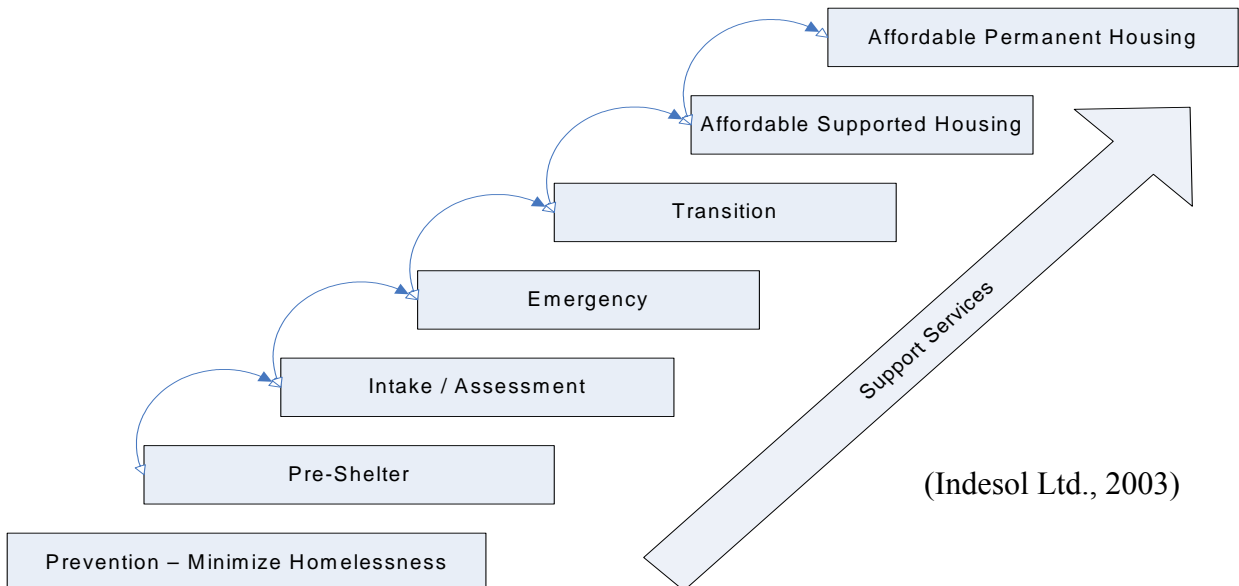
## Introduction

The issue of homelessness is one that cannot be ignored in Lethbridge. Homeless Counts conducted over the past three years have shown an ever-present population of people in Lethbridge that are living in places that are neither permanent, healthy or sustainable. The complexity of this issue requires a comprehensive approach to ‘end homelessness’. This approach should focus not only on charitable volunteerism, but also on support and contributions from every facet of society: all levels of government, citizens, public and private sectors, etc.

According to Philip Mangano, Executive Director of the United States Interagency Council on Homelessness and Presidential Advisor, efforts in the past (and present) can be seen as an attempt to “manage” the crisis of homelessness. These have been utterly and obviously unsuccessful (2006). Yet communities continue to employ some of these same methods today. At a conference in Red Deer on Sept. 26, 2006, Mangano stated that until communities start to change their approach to solving this problem, they can certainly expect the exact same results.

The 2006 Homeless Census is a tool that is being used to assist in its strategy to ‘end homelessness’ in Lethbridge. The study provides a “snapshot in time” of the situation in our community. In this effort, the Social Housing in Action Committee (SHIA) can continue to use a comprehensive approach to eliminating, not managing, homelessness in our community, as outlined in “Bringing Lethbridge Home” (2006).

“Bringing Lethbridge Home” outlines the strategy that the City of Lethbridge and SHIA are currently taking to end homelessness in our community. SHIA is charged with the duty of implementing this plan, and in response to this duty, has created a housing continuum to create a better understand the process involved in ending homelessness:





## **Purpose**

The third annual Homeless Census builds on the process and recommendations acquired from the Homeless Count 2005. It follows the general format of the Lethbridge Homeless Count 2004 (Fenton, 2004), the Lethbridge Homeless Count 2005 (Gail, 2005) and the 'Biennial Count of Homeless Persons in Calgary' (Stroick, 2004). Although similar, revisions have been made to provide more comprehensive information regarding where people are "homeless", and why they are not able to access safe, affordable and sustainable housing.

Using the information gained from the 2005 Homeless Count (Gail, 2005), the Structure and Research Committee (a sub-committee of SHIA) has identified a need to further determine the extent of homelessness in Lethbridge. This research has built upon the information gained in 2005 and provided a sample that can be comparatively analyzed in relation to last years data.

The 2006 Homeless Census was conducted on October 12<sup>th</sup>, 2006 to provide a snapshot of the extent of homelessness in Lethbridge. Unfortunately, due to time constraints of the coordinators, the count had to take place one week later than last year. However, it was decided that the relative time of year was sufficient to be able to reliably compare the data between the two years. The Census is undertaken, not only to document the existence of this issue, but to also create community awareness and assist to provide the necessary data to plan and develop policy for future community responses to the homeless crisis.

The focus of the study is to gain quantitative data from individuals interviewed 'on the street' and 'individuals accessing agency support' about their personal experience of homelessness. Qualitative volunteer observations on demographic characteristics of the interviewed population were also incorporated into the study. New to this years study was the inclusion of a question concerning the respondents' reasons for not being able to obtain affordable and sustainable housing. In past Homeless Counts, individuals only responded to whether or not they had been able to find affordable housing. In this years Census, they are asked to define reasons why they were not able to do so (see Figure 2). In addition, information was collected concerning community housing options and the accessibility of subsidized housing. The Lethbridge Housing Authority and Treaty 7 Urban Housing Authority were contacted regarding the number of their subsidized housing units, as well as to the numbers of individuals on waitlists for these units. Local churches and religious organizations known to serve the "homeless" population were also asked if they provided any services on the evening of October 12<sup>th</sup>.

## Definitions

The definitions used in the 2006 Homeless Census are:

- Homeless - An individual who is: living on the street; staying in places not meant for human habitation; moving continuously among temporary housing arrangements provided by strangers, friends, or family; staying overnight in temporary shelters, or; has a permanent address but is not able to stay there on the evening of [October 12<sup>th</sup>] (Fenton, 2004)
- Unable to find affordable housing – An individual who is unable to find affordable housing that is within their means, and sustainable.
- Hidden Homeless – The individuals who are not visible. They are either improperly housed, or temporarily staying with relatives or friend, they constitute approximately 80% of the homeless population (Raising the Roof, 2004).
- Emergency Shelters – Provide temporary accommodation for homeless individuals and families who would otherwise sleep in the streets, generally including supports such as food, clothing and counselling. Included in this definition are transitional housing agencies, as the people accessing this type of housing would be fundamentally homeless, if not for these services.

These definitions have been used with intent in creating a more inclusive term for “Homelessness”. This is done while methodological constraints require specification around the types of agencies that provide services to these people. The definition of homeless has also been created in an attempt to incorporate the 2004 Homeless Count (Fenton, 2004), the First Report Card on Homelessness in Ottawa (Evaluation Working Group, 2005), the Biennial Count of Homeless Persons in Calgary (Stroick, 2004), and those used by SHIA (Indesol, 2003).

## Census Methodology

The Homeless Census was conducted on October 12<sup>th</sup>, 2006 between the hours of 7 p.m. and 9 p.m. On the evening of the Census, the temperature was between 0 and 4 degrees Celsius. This date was chosen in order to provide a comparison to the count that was conducted on October 6, 2005 of last year. There is a one-week discrepancy from last years’ date as a result of our inability to coordinate the Census in time to conduct it on October 6<sup>th</sup> of this year. This may have caused some inconsistency in the data collected this year, but it was determined that the relative time of year remains close enough for comparative analysis between the two studies.

The Lethbridge Homeless Census was modeled after the Calgary Biennial Homeless Count. In doing so a similar approach was taken; one that employs a dual focus of ‘Street Count’ and ‘Agency Count’. Engaging these two areas concurrently optimized the use of available resources while decreasing the likelihood of double counting.

The main purpose of the Census is to determine how many individuals in the City of Lethbridge are currently living without a home, be that in a shelter, on the streets, in the coulees, parks, etc. In addition to actual counted numerical data, this study also attempts to determine reasons that may undermine the feasibility of obtaining affordable housing by individuals experiencing homelessness. This portion of the study incorporates the most significant revision to last year's process, by asking our respondents to describe **WHY** they have not been able to find a safe place to sleep, instead of only asking if they could find a safe place to live or not.

A revision in methodology in the 2006 Homeless Census from the 2005 Homeless Count was made to eliminate the different data collection methods used in both the Agency and Street Counts. For the sake of validity, both the Street enumerators and Agency participants received the exact same questionnaire (See Appendix A for Data Collection forms). It is noted, however, that because of the intimate nature in which people receive services from the Agencies in Lethbridge, some of the questions may not have been requirements if the answer was already known (i.e. age).

The sections below describe the methodologies for both the Street and Agency counts for the 2006 Homeless Census.

### ***Street Count***

Due to limited time and resources, areas most frequented by homeless people were targeted. Although these areas were already established for the previous Count, the services of the Lethbridge Regional Police Service, Emergency Medical Services, and the Mobile Urban Street Team (MUST), the Lethbridge Emergency Shelter and the City of Lethbridge Parks department were accessed to determine key areas. These individuals' expertise and familiarity with the homeless population assisted in renewing and adding to the areas of focus. These areas were then divided up and assigned to teams.

The teams were designed to have four members: two male, two female, and at least one Aboriginal person. Each team was also assigned, based on volunteer turnout, an experienced Team Leader. Each team was instructed to cover their areas, to the best of their abilities, within the two-hour period. Teams were assigned one clipboard and instructed to follow a set protocol when interviewing individuals they encountered; this included a few brief questions and some observations, (Appendix E). The team leaders were given a map of their focus area, screening questions, data collection sheets, emergency contact numbers, and resource booklets for individuals without a place to stay. In addition to these responsibilities, teams were asked to demarcate areas on their maps that showed evidence of people "sleeping rough" (i.e. lean-to shelters, blankets, evidence of a fire, etc). Granola bars were also provided as a thank you to participants.

For safety, the teams were instructed to stay together at all times and to bring flashlights and cell phones. Flashing beacons, (with whistles), and emergency contact numbers were provided. Every team was to report every 30 minutes, with a Lethbridge Regional Police

Officer and the coordinator of the Census acting as area rovers. Areas with decreased visibility were assigned to individuals who were familiar with the population being studied.

During the orientation, a Lethbridge Regional Police Officer instructed the volunteers in safety precautions. Prior to this, a Risk Manager was consulted and agreed on the course of action. Each individual who attended was required to sign an Oath of Confidentiality and volunteer information was recorded for Workers Compensation coverage. Volunteers were also required to sign in and out and were given to opportunity to fill out an evaluation form.

### ***Agency Count***

In the previous Homeless Counts conducted for the City of Lethbridge, community agencies were given a different set of instructions and protocol for collecting data than the Street volunteers. In order to ensure validity and that the data collected could be generally applied to the population being studied, the 2006 Homeless Census provided the participating agencies with the same format and methodology for collecting information. It is noted that the relationship that an agency has with a respondent is much different from that of a Street Volunteer, and some of the answers to the questionnaire may have already been known to the agencies (i.e. age).

In a meeting between the participating agencies and the Census coordinator, agencies were provided with written instructions, including definitions, about how to use the data collection forms, (Appendix B). These instructions were explained in the meeting, and those agencies that did not attend were contacted and provided instructions. The meeting was also an opportunity to discuss and elaborate upon the purposes and roles of the study, and to receive constructive input on how to improve the Census process, from an agency standpoint.

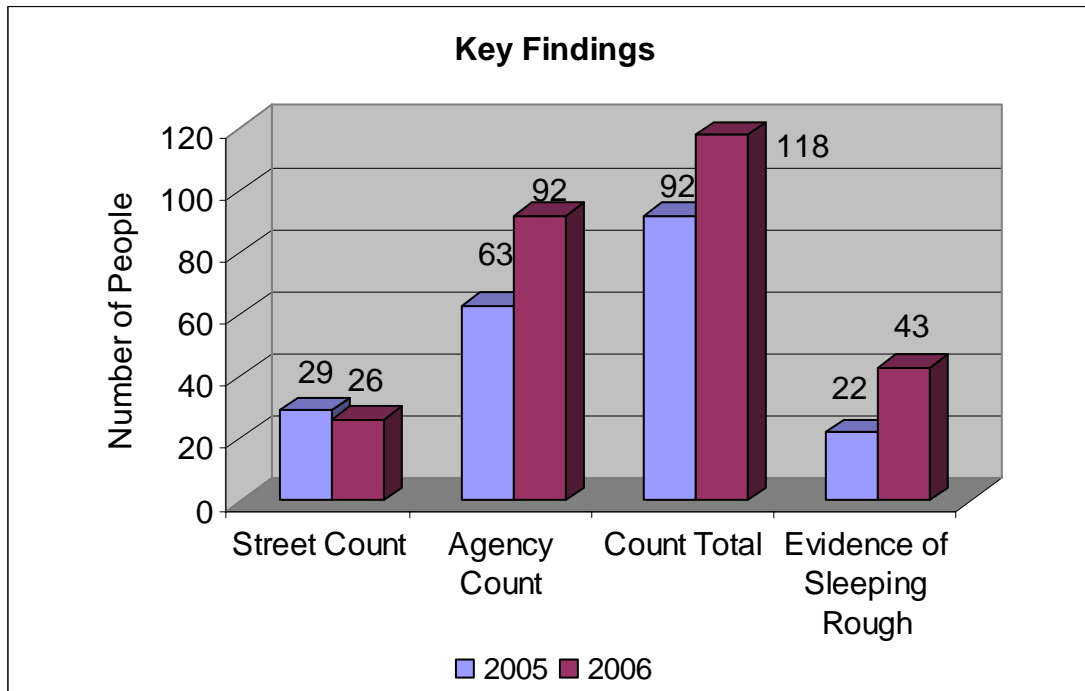
The agencies, included for their community involvement as either Emergency Shelters or temporary housing providers, were given data collection forms identical to the ones provided to the Street enumerators (Appendix A) and were instructed to interview their clients on the evening of October 12th. They were also provided with contact information in case of further inquiry.

Unlike past Homeless Counts, individuals who received transitional housing services were defined as homeless, based on the belief that without these services they would have no other place to live.

## 2006 Census Results and Comparative Analysis

The data collected from the 2006 Homeless Census shows that there has been a significant increase in the number of people identified as “Homeless” in our community. The Street Count found 26 people defined as “homeless” Although this number is down from 29 counted in 2005 (Gail), it is the only incidence of a decrease when comparing results from the two years. The total number of people defined as “Homeless” this year is 118, an increase of 26 people from the previous years count of 92 (Gail, 2005). In addition to this, the incidence of volunteers finding evidence of people “sleeping rough” nearly doubled, from 22 sightings in 2005, to 43 sightings in this years study (Gail, 2005). The graph below (Figure 1) shows the increasing trends (except for the Street Count) in homelessness from last years results.

(Figure 1)

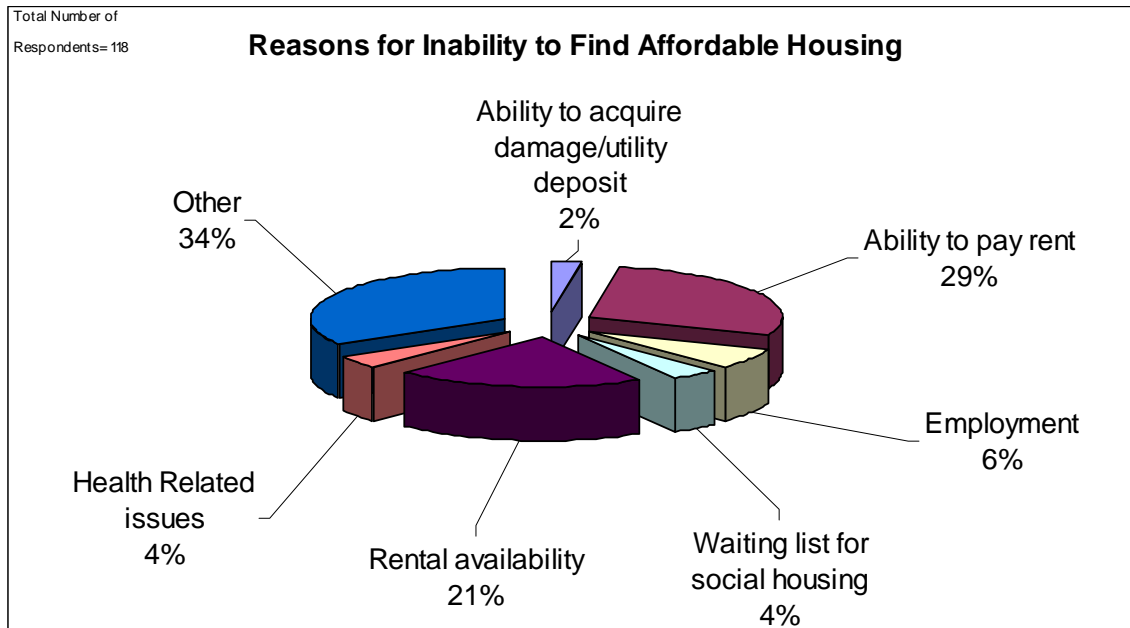


The 2005 Homeless Count reported a total of 77 people from both the Street and Agency counts that fell in the category “Unable to Find Affordable Housing” (Gail, 2005). However, the study only focused data collected in this category for people being served in an agency as being unable to find affordable housing. This year, every person who fell under the definition of homeless, either in the Street or Agency Counts, were considered “Unable to Find Affordable Housing”. As such, the 2006 Census showed that 118 people that provided data in the questionnaire fell in this category.

The 2006 Homeless Census expands on the information gathered around affordable housing issues by asking respondents why they were experiencing housing barriers. The qualitative answers were categorized according to what option provided on the questionnaire sheet best suited the respondents answer. The pie-graph below (Figure 2)

illustrates the options listed on the questionnaire, and the wide range of answers provided. Of the 118 respondents, 29% stated “the ability to pay rent” as their main barrier in obtaining permanence in an affordable housing situation. An additional 21% of respondents claimed that the availability of rental units was the major reason for not finding affordable housing.

(Figure 2)



**\*\* NOTE: Respondents were able to select as many categories as they felt their situation required.**

The 2006 Homeless Census questionnaire included volunteer observations on the demographic profile of the individuals responding to the Census questionnaire. These observations included: the respondent’s age, gender, familial presence, and whether or not the individual was of a visible minority. In the past volunteers were asked to specify what ethnic group (i.e. Aboriginal, Caucasian, visible minority, etc.) was observed. However, because of methodological revisions, the 2006 study consisted of an observation regarding whether the individual was of a visible minority, or not.

(Figure 3)

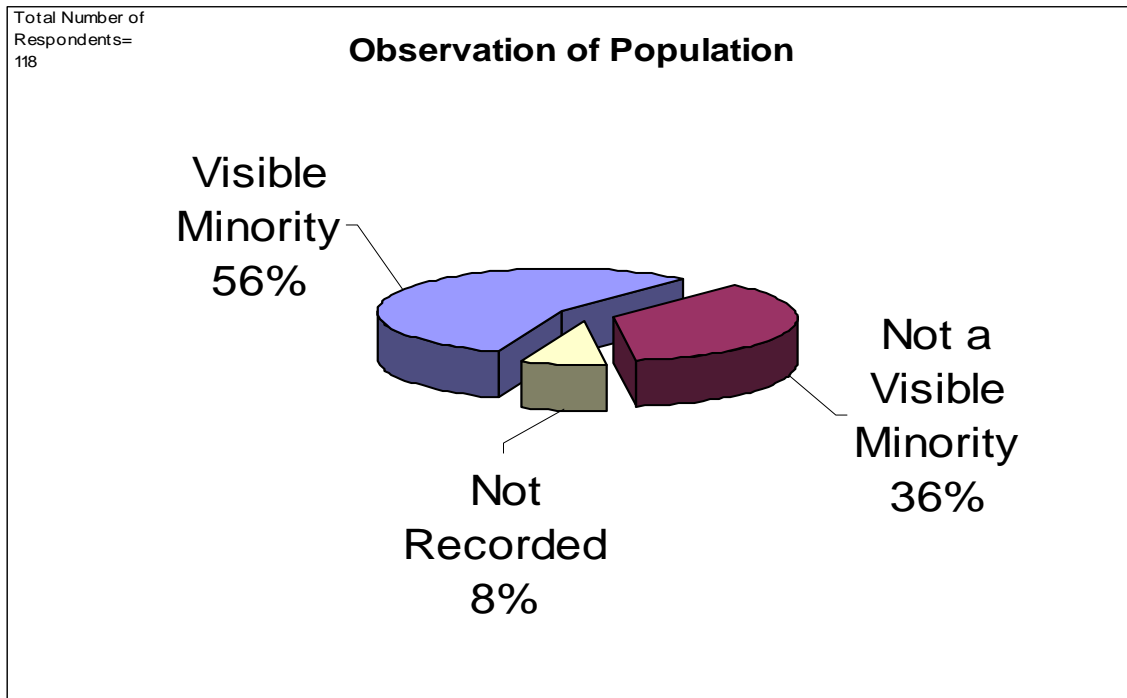
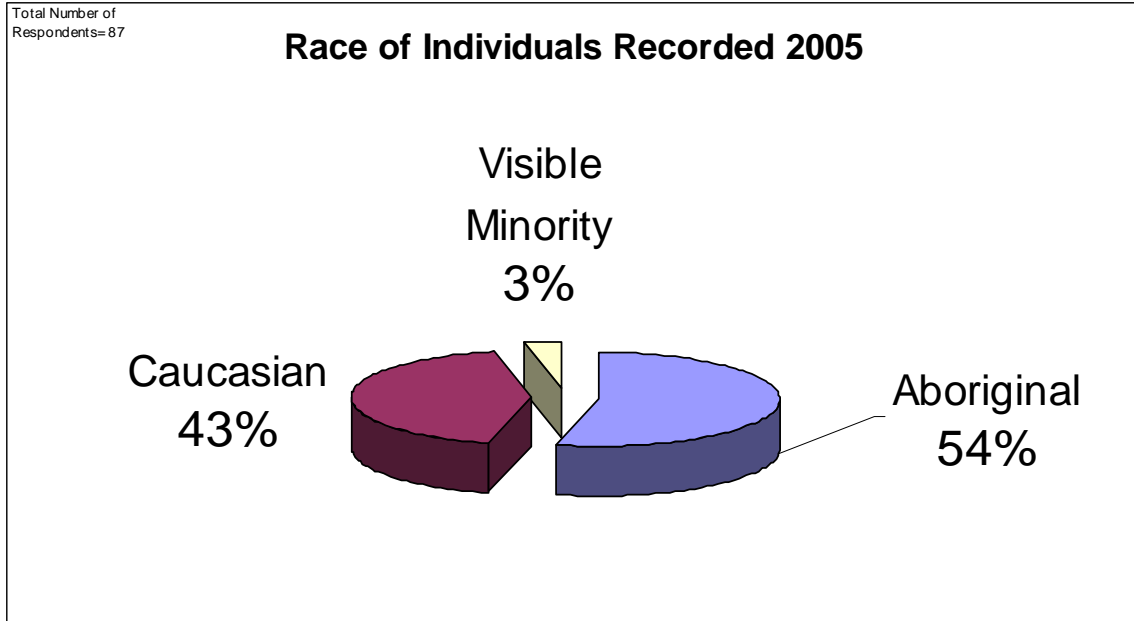


Figure 3, shown above, illustrates the observation of whether the respondent was of a 'Visible Minority' or not in the 2006 Homeless Census, as observed by the Street and Agency Enumerators. Last years Homeless Count asked volunteers to classify respondents as 'Aboriginal', 'Caucasian', or 'Visible Minority'. This difference reflects a change in methodology, and the results from year-to-year cannot be directly compared. However, in 2005, the 'Aboriginal' and 'Visible Minority' categories contained 50 individuals, with only 3 of these being of a 'Visible Minority'. A combination of these two categories can be compared to the 'Visible Minority' category that was used this year. An additional 37 people were recorded as being Caucasian in 2005, which can also be conditionally compared to the 'Not a Visible Minority' category in 2006. Although the methodology was changed, interpretation of the results provides a 'picture' of trends shown in this specific demographic category. Figure 4, shown on the next page, provides a percentage distribution based on racial observation made by volunteers of the respondents from the 2005 Homeless Count.

(Figure 4)



(Gail, 2005)

Volunteers were also asked to make a generalized observation regarding the age of the questionnaire respondents, in order to get a “picture” of the age demographic of the homeless population in Lethbridge. Figure 5, shown below, separates the observed estimated ages into categories.

(Figure 5)

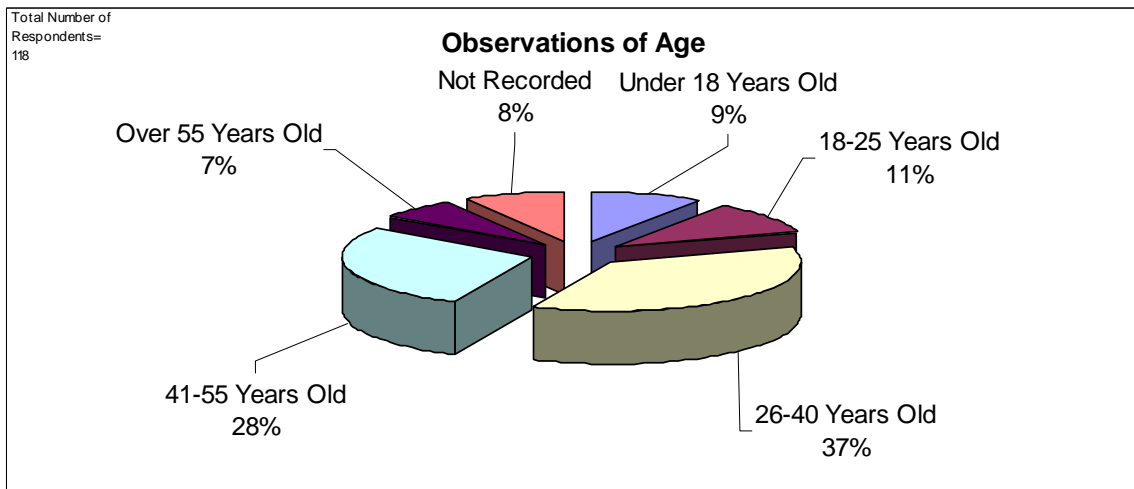
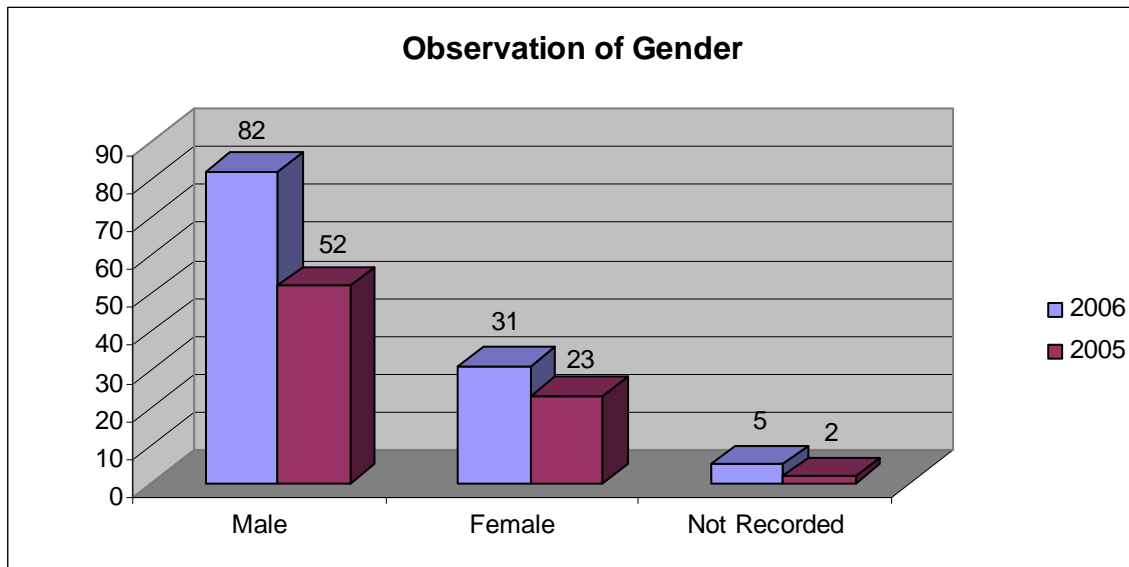




Figure 6, shown below, compares the gender distributions from the 2005 Homeless Count to the 2006 Homeless Census.

(Figure 6)

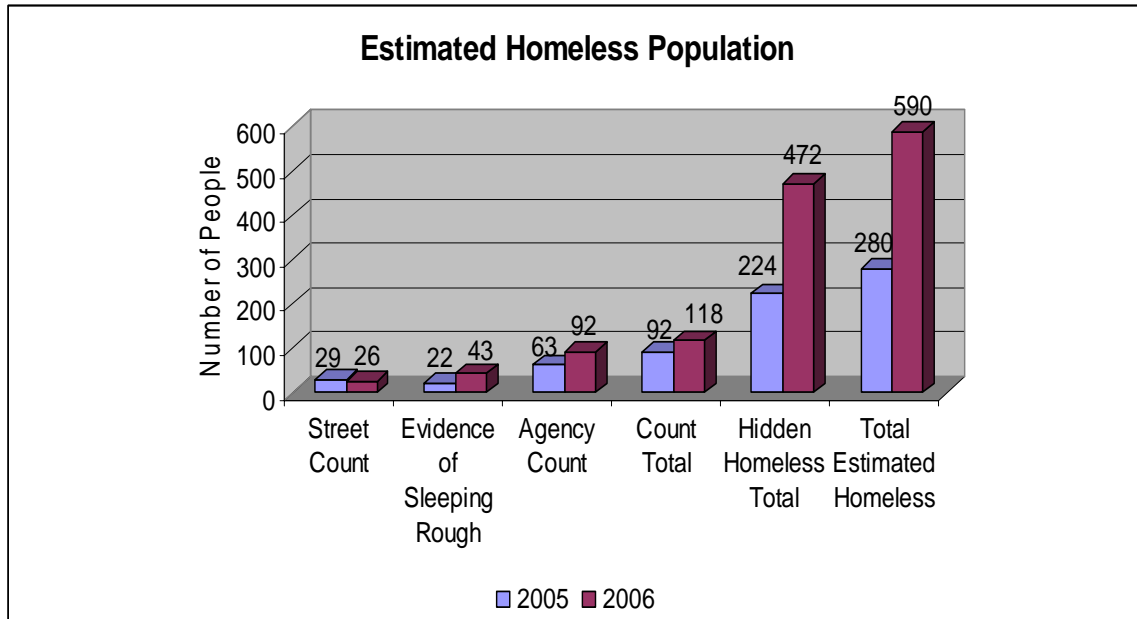


## Discussion

The assertion that Lethbridge has an increasing homeless population is certainly proven by the 2006 Homeless Census. The numbers provided by this report provide evidence of the increase, but it is assumed that these numbers are actually quite low. This comes as the result of the inherent nature of the Census being unable to account for every homeless person, in every location at the exact time that the 2006 Homeless Census was undertaken. However, the numbers do indicate that there is an increased population in the Emergency Shelters in Lethbridge, as well and an increased use of agencies providing services to this population. Although the actual number of people counted on the streets of Lethbridge this year is lower, this could be a result of the general method (i.e. dual street and agency counts) utilized for the Lethbridge Census failing to capture the actual number of people who are homeless.

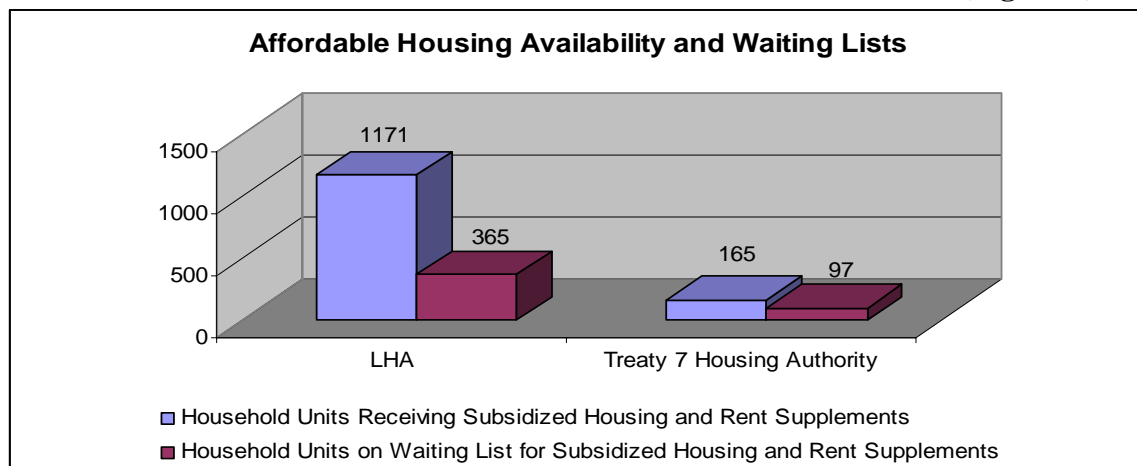
Research indicates that a census or count of this sort that attempts to capture an accurate number of people living homeless in a given location can presuppose that the numbers achieved will only represent 20% of the actual homeless population for that area (Raising the Roofs, 2004). According to this hypothesis 80% of people that are ‘homeless’ are “invisible” members of the population. Application of this formula to the 2006 Homeless Census would indicate that the 118 people accounted in the Census only comprises 20% of the actual estimated homeless population of 590. The estimated number of “invisible homeless” individuals, based on this formula is 472. Figure 7, shown below, not only illustrates the increase in “actual” homeless population between the 2005 and 2006 study, but the significant increase in estimated homeless individuals in the City of Lethbridge, as well as a rise in the sightings of evidence of individuals “sleeping rough”.

(Figure 7)



New to the 2006 Homeless Census was the addition of a question that highlighted some of the major barriers faced by the homeless population of Lethbridge in their attempts to secure housing. The answers provided (see Figure 2) indicate that a majority of this population either cannot afford to pay rent in Lethbridge, or cannot find a suitable and affordable place to live. The waiting lists for two subsidized housing agencies in Lethbridge (the Treaty 7 Housing Authority and the Lethbridge Housing Authority) indicate the severity of the issue, revealing over 400 household that were waiting for subsidy services. Figure 8, shown below, illustrates the amount of subsidized housing that is currently being provided, and the waiting lists to access this type of service in Lethbridge.

(Figure 8)



The Homeless Census 2006 study also provides “a snapshot in time” of the characteristics of the homeless population in the City of Lethbridge. In order to develop new services, and evaluate the efficiency of the existing ones, there needs to be an understanding of whom these services are designed for, and how they need to be implemented. Demographical information for this study was gained through volunteer observation of visible minority status, age and gender. The data collected indicated a generalized pattern of the homeless population that shows a majority of respondents being male (69%), belonging to a visible minority (56%), between the ages of 26 and 40 (37%). There is a historical belief in our community that the issue of homelessness belongs to the Aboriginal population, and people that belong to a ‘Visible Minority’ are definitely overrepresented in this study but observations indicate 36% of the respondents in the Census DID NOT appear to be of a ‘Visible Minority’. This simply is not an issue that is exclusive to the Aboriginal population of Lethbridge.

The 2006 Homeless Census also revealed that 8 families were, according to the definition used for the Census, homeless on the evening of October 12, 2006. These families had a combined total of 16 children that did not have a permanent place to sleep that night. In addition to this, Woods’ Homes, the Emergency Youth Shelter provided emergency shelter for 10 youth on the evening of October 12; 8 in their facility, and 2 in off-site emergency placements. St. Vincent De Paul Church, who provides services to people in need of assistance, also reported that they had been contacted by a family that was living in their vehicle in an empty lot on the evening of the Census. However, the number of people in that particular family was not disclosed, nor is it clear whether or not they were enumerated in the street count.

## **Limitations**

The 2006 Lethbridge Homeless Count provides valuable data concerning the marginalized homeless population in Lethbridge. It provides a “temperature gauge” for the “climate” of the issue of homelessness in our community, by supplying some generalized characteristics about the population. However, it does not provide an extremely accurate temperature. The nature of this type of study imposes limitations in the data that is collected, in the means used to obtain it, and the amount of validity that it holds in its applicability to the population of people experiencing homelessness in our community. It is not pure research.

The actual collection of Census data on October 12, 2006 was subject to a variety of limitations that could have affected the outcome. This could include, but is not exclusive to:

- Weather conditions
- The date reflecting an irregularity in income for the homeless population of Lethbridge, resulting in “invisible homelessness”
- Individual being intimidated by the Street enumerators
- Time constraints for coordination of the Census, resulting in poor planning.

- Lack of support from agencies that provide services to the targeted population
- Inability to cover every location in Lethbridge, both outside and indoors
- Possibility of visual and/or spatial restriction causing people to be missed in a specific location

This list is not comprehensive, nor does it mean that the listed limitations will necessarily occur. Nevertheless, they must be noted and accounted for, in order to understand the limitations of and best uses for the collected data.

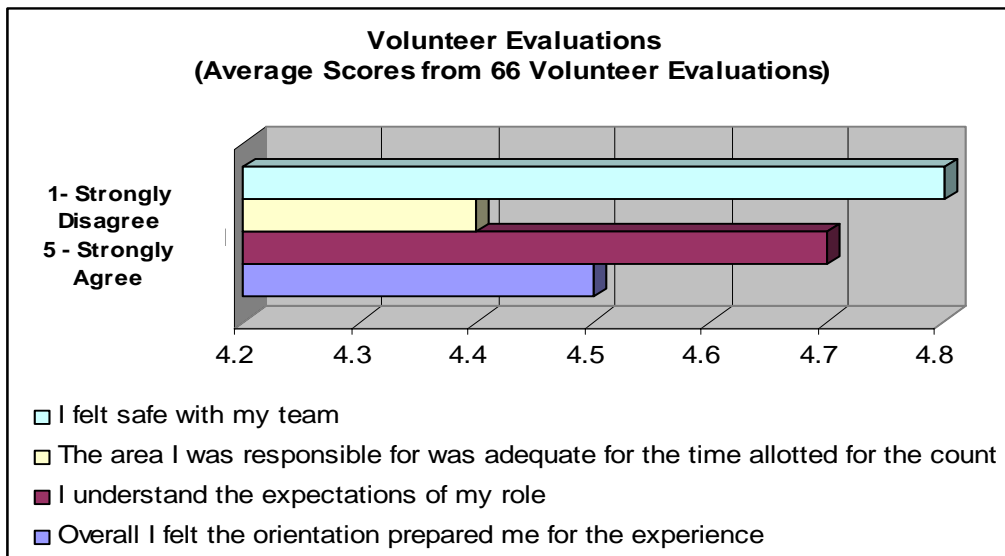
The Homeless Census also required that volunteers make a personal observation about the individual respondents' age, gender, and whether they were of a visible minority or not. For the Census, it was determined by the coordinators that there was not enough time or resources to properly train the volunteers to have a discussion with respondents about their personal characteristics. An insensitive approach to these topics could have also caused unnecessary conflict for the volunteers, and therefore it was decided to proceed with observation only. However, these observations these characteristics of the respondent and could potentially bias the data obtained from the 2006 Homeless Census.

It is important that the use of the information obtained from this study be limited in its scope, as the data obtained might not accurately define the homeless population in Lethbridge. The Census provides a generalized description of the visible population, and highlights the existence of homelessness in our community.

### Volunteer Evaluations and Recommendations

Immediately following the Homeless Census 2006 Street Count, volunteer Street Enumerators were asked to fill out an evaluation on their perceptions of the Census process and its organization (See Appendix F for Evaluation Sheet). Evaluations were made on a scale of one to five, with one meaning "Strongly disagree" and five meaning "Strongly agree". Figure 9, shown below, shows the averaged score of the 66 volunteer evaluations that were received.

(Figure 9)



***Volunteer process recommendations:***

The three most frequent recommendations were:

- Provide more granola bars, or more than just granola bars, to respondents.
- Provide better direction of areas covered and more specified maps/plan area size more efficiently.
- Go out later, or during different times of the day.

***Coordinator Recommendations for the Homeless Census Report:***

- Findings should be distributed to agencies and volunteers involved. The report is to be available to service providers, local community groups, and the individuals who participated in the study.
- Create and include agency evaluations for next year.
- Provide advance notification of the Census to agencies and allow more time for their planned contribution for the Census
- Consider allowing individuals to self-identify race/ethnicity/cultural affiliation
- Continue annual comparative analysis

## References

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**Appendix A – Street and Agency Count Data Form**



**HOMELESS CENSUS - DATA SHEET**

SLEEPING PLACE										UNABLE TO FIND AFFORDABLE HOUSING										OBSERVATION ONLY					
Home	Shelter	Other agency	Relatives or family	Friend/Acquaintance	Hospital	Vehicle	Park and/or coulees	Street and/or Doorway	Other	Ability to acquire damage/utility deposit	Ability to pay rent	Employment	Waiting list for social housing	Rental availability	Rental location	Rental size	Access to transportation	Health Related issues	Other	AGE	Visible Minority (Y) (N)	Male Female (M) (F)	FAMILY (Y) (N)	CHILDREN (#)	

## **Appendix B – Agency Instructions – Homeless Census Questionnaire**

As part of a SHIA Initiative, the Structure and Research Committee wants to define the extent of homelessness in our community. To do this, SHIA is organizing the third annual Homeless Census on Thursday October 12, 2006. The data collected from this study will be used to further meet the needs of homeless persons in Lethbridge.

As an agency that provides services to homeless persons or persons at risk of being homeless, you are invited to participate in the Homeless Census on October 12, 2006. This count will give us a snap shot in time of the Homeless situation in Lethbridge. As such we are requesting that on the evening of October 12 between the hours of **7 – 9 p.m.**, each agency count the number of persons who meet the criteria outlined in the data collection sheets. Attached to this correspondence is a procedural guide that we would like you to use in order to acquire information from the people(s) that your agency serves.

We would appreciate your assistance in this matter and would like to offer a volunteer to come to your facility and assist you with the Count that evening. In order to get as accurate of results as possible we need support from you. For further information or to request a volunteer please contact Leah Bruder at 320-3051. The data collection sheets can be returned through fax at 380-2512, or we will pick them up. Thank you.

### **Definitions for Data Collection Sheets**

**Homeless** – An individual who is: living on the street; staying in places not meant for human habitation; moving continuously among temporary housing arrangements provided by strangers, friends, or family; staying overnight in temporary shelters, or; has a permanent address but is not able to stay there on the evening of October 12<sup>th</sup>

**Unable to find affordable housing\*\*** – If your client is at your facility because she/he is unable to find affordable housing for any of the following reasons, please indicate on the count sheet what circumstance listed below best describes his/her experience (in his/her own words) by checking the corresponding box:

- Ability to acquire damage deposit/utility deposit
- Ability to pay rent
- Employment
- Waiting list for social housing
- Rental availability
- Rental location
- Rental size
- Access to transportation
- Health related issues
- Other.

\*\* If a client is not homeless or has a permanent and sustainable housing situation for the evening of October 12, **DO NOT RECORD ANY INFORMATION.**

**Gender:** Indicate (F) for female or (M) for male

**Age:** Indicate age, if given

**Visible Minority:** Indicate if individual is a visible minority or not (as per instructions; see attached instructions)

**Family:** Indicate if you are serving a family unit

**Children:** If you are serving a family, indicate the number of children you are serving



**Appendix C - Oath of Confidentiality**



**CITY OF**  
*Lethbridge*

As a condition of my engagement as a volunteer I, \_\_\_\_\_,  
agree to maintain confidentiality of all information of a personal, financial, or technical nature  
disclosed to, or ascertained by me in the performance of my engagement, including any  
information, policy or knowledge generated as a function of the homeless count conducted on  
behalf of the City of Lethbridge.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Witness

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## **Appendix D – Homeless Census 2006 Orientation Agenda**

### **Volunteer Registration**

- Sign In
- Sign Oath
- Provide Volunteers with flashing lanyards/nametags and have supper

### **Go to Council Chambers**

- Diane Randell (Introduce the Mayor)
- Mayor Tarleck (Thank volunteers)
- Cst. Stodolka (Safety orientation)
  
- Clayton Buchanan/Dianne Randell
  - Questionnaire/data collection sheet explanation
  - Emergency numbers and rover explanation/safety concerns
  - Respect and rights for the homeless AND volunteers
  - Check in every ½ hour
  - Announce teams and designated meeting areas

### **Team Leader Meeting**

- Hand out clipboards
- Answer any questions
- Cell phones – made sure they assign a number and inform Lindsay at registration desk
- Granola Bars

### **Team Leaders Meet with Teams/Conduct Homeless Census**

- Confirm contact number with registration
- Meet each other, decide who's driving, and hit the streets!

## Appendix E – Homeless Census Questionnaire

Homeless Census Questionnaire- City of Lethbridge, Oct. 12, 2006

### PROCEDURE

1. Introduce yourself as a Volunteer for Social Housing in Action. Explain that you are doing a count for people who don't have a place to sleep tonight and ask permission to talk with them. Inform them that it will take only a minute and that they have the right to quit at any time.
2. Ask... **“Have you already been counted tonight?”**
3. If **“yes”**, thank them and move on to the next person. **DO NOT RECORD ANY INFORMATION**
4. Ask... **“Where you will sleep tonight?”** (Use following options as prompts)
  - Home
  - Shelter
  - Other agency
  - Relatives or family
  - Friend/Acquaintance
  - Hospital
  - Vehicle
  - Park/coulees
  - Street/doorway
  - Other

### RECORD SLEEPING PLACE BY CHECKING CORRESPONDING BOX

If the answer is at **“home”** record response, thank them, and move on. Do not continue with the rest of the questionnaire.

5. Ask them... **“What has kept you from finding a place to live?”** (Use following options as prompts)
  - Ability to acquire damage/utility deposit
  - Ability to pay rent
  - Employment
  - Social programs wait list (LHA, Treaty 7, etc)
  - Rental availability
  - Rental location
  - Rental size (# of bedrooms, etc)
  - Access to transportation
  - Health related issues
  - Other

### RECORD THE RESPONSE BY CHECKING THE CORRESPONDING BOX

6. **Volunteer Observations (Record on Count Sheet)**
  - Visible Minority (Yes or No) **DO NOT ASK FOR THIS INFORMATION**  
*(Observation Only: record if the individual appears to be a visible minority)*
  - Age **DO NOT ASK FOR THIS INFORMATION**  
*(Estimate Age or provide if known or expressed - i.e. agencies)*
  - Record how many families you encounter *(observation only)*
  - Record how many children either "on their own" or in a family *(observation only)*
  - Record the gender of the individual *(observation only)*
7. **Thank the person for their time, and present give-away and “Getting Connected” booklet.**

**Appendix F – Street Team Volunteer Evaluation Sheet**



**Homeless Census 2006 Volunteer Evaluation**

1. Overall I felt the orientation prepared me for the experience.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree				Strongly Agree

2. I understood the expectations of my role.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree				Strongly Agree

3. The area I was responsible for was adequate for the time allotted for the count.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree				Strongly Agree

4. I felt safe with my team.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree				Strongly Agree

5. My recommendations for next year are: \_\_\_\_\_

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If you have additional comments please contact:  
 Diane Randell      320-3917 ([drandell@lethbridge.ca](mailto:drandell@lethbridge.ca))  
 Leah Bruder        320-3051 ([lbruder@lethbridge.ca](mailto:lbruder@lethbridge.ca))

## **Appendix G- Qualitative Volunteer Recommendations**

- Check coulees in warmer weather
- Conduct census at a different time of night- i.e. after stores close
- Conduct census on a weekend (Friday or Saturday night)
- Clearer explanation of volunteer roles
- Provide more notice for volunteer sign-up
- Go with smaller groups (maximum of 3)
- Organize teams better (more meeting time with team leaders)
- Adjust area sizes (some are too large, some are too small)
- Larger areas and fewer teams
- Offer more snacks for respondents (possibly water)
- Provide team leaders with notice of their position and their role as team leader
- Better explanation of clipboard package (i.e. phone numbers, count sheets, etc)
- Conduct census at a warmer time of year
- Supply flashlights
- Conduct two censuses to provide comparative analysis
- Provide a better pen, or system for marking sleeping areas on maps
- Get input from homeless people themselves as to how the census should be conducted
- Use the whistles as give-aways
- Conduct the count throughout the day
- Ensure that all teams fully understand not to touch anything
- Conduct a survey of volunteer demographics
- Team numbers should be assigned at the time of registration.
- Team members should be seated together for dinner, in order to become acquainted. As well, it would afford the organizing committee a chance to ensure that each team has an experienced Team Leader, as well as to reassign volunteers to other teams if necessary.
- Each team should be provided with a “census package” ...booklets, granola bars etc. This would avoid the situation of last night when there were not sufficient granola bars for each of the 19 teams.
- It should be the responsibility of the Team Leader to have the necessary safety equipment...cell phone and flashlight. The cell phone number should be registered at the time the Team Lead registers for the evening
- The “area maps” should be assigned the same number as the team.