

060134

6/12/06

PROJECT REPORT

**CITY OF GAINESVILLE
SUPPLEMENTAL COLD WEATHER
SHELTER
JANUARY-MARCH, 2006**

**THE ALACHUA COUNTY HOUSING
AUTHORITY
&
HOLY TRINITY EPISCOPAL CHURCH**

Project Overview

From January 1 through March 29, 2006, the City of Gainesville funded a supplemental cold weather shelter at Holy Trinity Episcopal Church (HTEC) in downtown Gainesville. The Alachua County Housing Authority (ACHA) administered the shelter and employed a full time staff and utilized volunteers from the University of Florida, Gainesville High School, the Alachua County Coalition for the Homeless and Hungry, and the congregation of HTEC. The shelter was open seven nights a week from 8pm to 7am, with intake lasting from 8-11pm. Breakfast was served each morning thanks to donations from Gainesville Harvest and other charitable organizations. Each resident was allocated a small storage bin that remained under lock and key with residents able to access it each morning and evening.

The fellowship hall in HTEC served as the nightly quarters for the residents. The lights went out at 10pm nightly, after which inside noise was kept at a minimum. The courtyard was accessible the entire night for fresh air and cigarette breaks. Alcohol and drug use were strictly forbidden, and violators were escorted off the premises. Residents were allowed free access to bathroom. The fellowship hall was separated into two large sleeping areas, one for men and the other for women.

During intake, staff requested that residents provide their names, social security numbers, and dates of birth. At regular intervals, the staff conducted interviews with willing residents in order to gather more data about the homeless population in the city. The analysis below is based on the entry data and the results of 176 interviews.

Demographic Data

During the three months of operation, the cold weather shelter housed 498 different persons, all but two of them adults. The two children were accompanied by at least one parent, but the structure of the sleeping arrangements was not conducive to family housing. As such, the two children and their caretakers stayed only 1 night.

Out of 498 residents, 10 (2%) were over the age of 62. One hundred and three residents (20%) were between 51 and 61, and another 86 (17%) were between 18 and 30 years old. The majority of residents, 262 (52%), were between 31 and 50 years old. Twenty-five residents (5%) chose not to give a birth date. The average age was 42 years.

AGE	MALE	FEMALE	TOTAL	% OF POP
0-17	2	0	2	<1%
18-30	64	22	86	17
31-50	221	41	262	52
51-61	88	15	103	20
Over 61	9	1	10	2
Not Given			25	5

The overwhelming majority of residents were male. Only 79 (16%) of residents were female, and this percentage was fairly constant across the age cohorts. Ten percent of those over 61 years were women; 15% of those between 51 and 61 as well as those between 31 and 50 were women. The percentage was significantly higher for those women between 18 and 30. One quarter of this youngest cohort was female.

Of the 498 residents, 200 (40%) were African-American, 256 (51%) were white, 24 (5%) were mixed race, 2 were Asian, 2 were Native American, 1 was a Pacific Islander, and 13 (2%) were not given. Out of 498, 29 (6%) were Hispanic.

RACE	% OF SHELTER POP	% OF G'VILLE POP.
African-American	40	22
White	51	69
Hispanic	6	6

The demographic data suggests that the elderly were the least likely to utilize the emergency shelter, and younger women were 60% more likely than their older counterparts to use the emergency shelter. Hispanics composed 6% of the shelter population, nearly equivalent to their portion of the general population of Gainesville. African-Americans were disproportionately represented in the shelter, representing 17% higher rates within the shelter than their percentage of Gainesville's total population.

Cold Weather Nights

The primary purpose of the supplemental shelter was to provide a warm and safe sleeping environment for the most destitute population of the city. HTEC admitted residents on both cold nights (below 45°F) and non-cold nights. The chart below shows the total number of residents and the temperature for each night the shelter was open.

The average attendance on a cold night was 90 persons. The 2006 winter season saw 48 such nights. The average attendance on the remaining 39 nights was an identical 90 persons. While it is remotely possible that the homeless population was unaware of the nightly weather conditions and assumed each night was a "cold night," it is much more

likely, since they spend much time outdoors, that the actual temperature had little impact on the residents' decisions on whether to stay at the shelter or not.

Infractions and Emergency Situations

The residents were repeatedly told of the various rules of the shelter, including the penalties for violations. Many of the rules were posted around the shelter to ensure that each resident was aware of behavioral expectations. Each Sunday through the beginning of March, the residents were requested to attend a community-style meeting in which their concerns and questions would be addressed and staff expectations were disseminated.

There were 37 incidents of gross rule violation resulting in temporary to permanent eviction during the three months of the shelter's operation. Seven of these incidents involved violent behavior and five of the incidents resulted in the permanent banning of the offending resident. Two more incidents involved blatant disrespect to the staff, with one of the offenders being permanently banned from HTEC. Seven incidents involved residents using alcohol on the HTEC grounds. Each offender was evicted for the night.

At least 10 incidents surrounded the breaking of curfew. Once residents logged into HMIS and were admitted into the shelter, they were required to stay on HTEC grounds for the evening. If a resident logged in and left the grounds and then returned, that person was evicted for the night. This rule was created in an ad hoc fashion, as we soon learned that residents would check in, go down the block and consume drugs or alcohol, and return late into the night, often causing a commotion and waking other residents.

The remaining 11 infractions were minor in nature, such as nonviolent altercations between residents, smoking within the fellowship hall, and a theft of cigarettes.

On sixteen separate occasions, a member of the staff was forced to contact the police or EMT regarding a resident. There were a total of five police visits, all but one concerned violent or extremely threatening behavior. The other call was to turn in a registered sexual predator for failing to inform the state of his new address. The staff called for an ambulance a total of eleven times, all for physical injuries or suspected overdoses.

On three more occasions, a staff member personally drove a resident to the hospital for medical care. Three residents were also voluntarily taken to a detoxification center by a member of the staff.

Survey Data and Analysis

Over the course of the shelter's operation, staff and volunteers conducted 176 interviews of the residents of the shelter. The interviewees were chosen randomly, but those residents that habitually slept at the shelter had a disproportionate chance of being selected for the survey. Thus, the data may be skewed towards those residents that had longer stays at HTEC. All of the data was self-reported by the interviewees, and no

attempts were made to verify any of the responses. All of the interviews were logged into the HMIS system either the same night or the following day. There were no redundant interviews.

Veteran Status

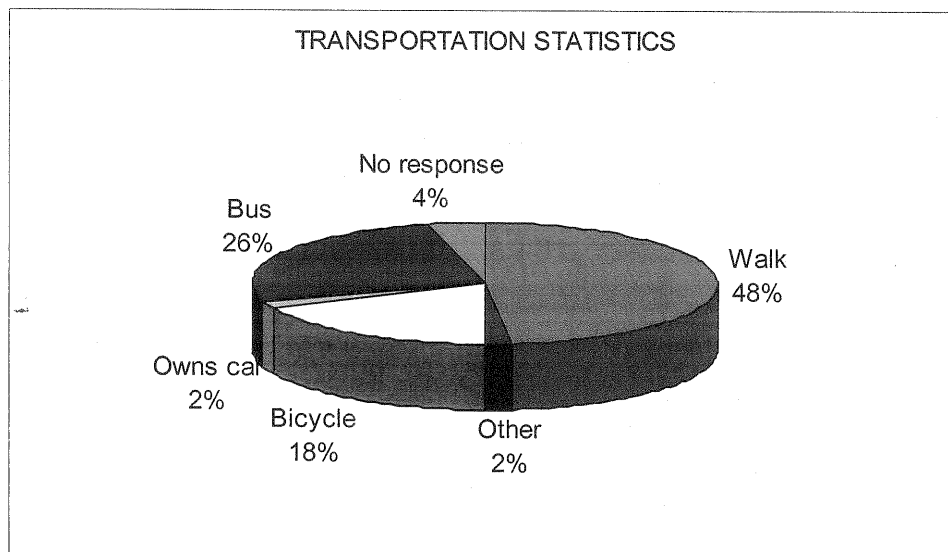
Of the 176 interviewees, 41 (23%) were veterans of the US military. Of the 41, 34 (83%) received either an honorable or medical discharge. Eleven (27%) suffered from a military service related disability. Only 15 (36.5%) were receiving any type of veteran services. Thirteen (32%) served in an active war zone.

If we assume that the interviews are representative of the shelter population, then 114 residents are veterans of the military, with 95 receiving an honorable or medical discharge. Of the 114 shelter veterans, however, 73 would not be receiving any veteran benefits.

This discrepancy suggests that future policy should emphasize matching qualifying veterans with available governmental services. Federal money has already been earmarked for veteran services, so local policy that does not attempt to place homeless veterans in programs specifically designed for them by the federal government means an avoidable duplication of services and unnecessary expenditures.

Transportation

Of the 176 interviewees, 85 (48%) had no means of transportation other than walking. Another 32 (18%) traveled primarily by bicycle. A total of 46 (26%) interviewees utilized the RTS bus system predominantly while 4 (2%) owned automobiles. If the shelter population is deemed representative, then some 500 homeless people in Alachua County have no transportation to travel to services or jobs.



Any future homeless initiative must address transportation needs. Considering that many services are out of walking distance, half (if shelter residents are representative of the homeless population in general) of the homeless cannot receive those services because they have no means of getting there. Furthermore, many job opportunities are not close to existing shelters (HTEC included). Since employment is vital step towards ending dependency and achieving self-sufficiency, then homeless policy must contain measures to assist homeless persons with transportation.

Institutional living before 18 years

Perhaps the most alarming set of statistics regarding the sheltered population concerns the proportion of residents that lived in an institutional setting before reaching the age of 18. Of the 176 interviewees, 47 (27%) lived in such an environment before adulthood. This proportion is staggering, as only 2-3% of Americans lived in a similar situation. Over one quarter of the interviewees came from some sort of fractured family. The lack of a family support system is a very telling risk factor for a homeless spell, and our data wholly supports this contention. If assumed that the shelter population is representative, then approximately 275 homeless persons in Alachua County lived in an institution for some part of their childhood.

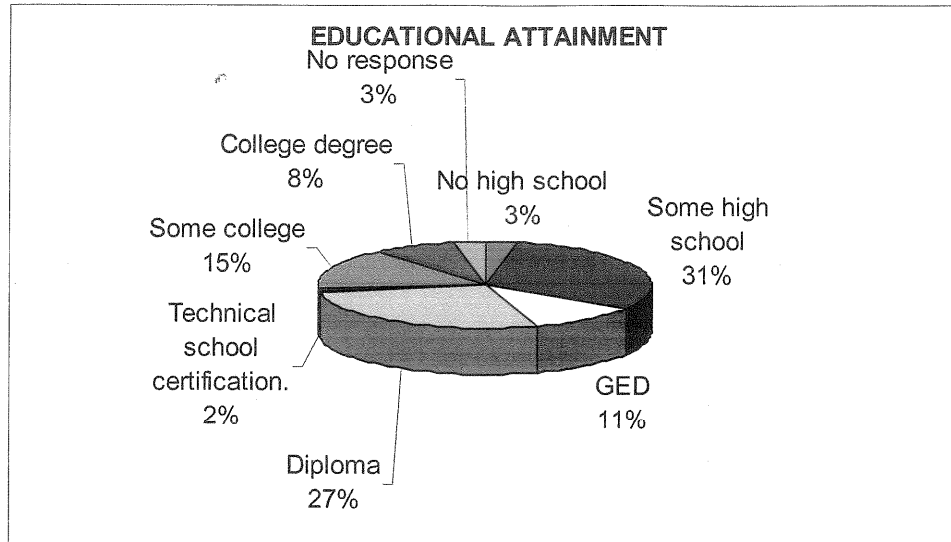
In many areas of the country, there has been a rising focus on discharge planning for the purposes of defraying the consequences of a lack of a family support network on a newly emancipated youth. This data certainly suggests that Gainesville warrants similar efforts. A program focusing on education, job training, and counseling for youths approaching 18 should have a positive impact on the proportion of formerly institutionalized youth in the homeless population.

Domestic Violence

Of the interviewees, 37 (21%) indicated that they were victims of domestic violence, though 23 reported that the violence occurred more than a year ago. If extrapolated for the entire shelter population, 104 of the residents would have been victims. If extended to the entire homeless population of Alachua County, then 200 homeless persons have been victims of domestic violence.

Education

Of the 176 interviewees, 68 (38%) had received a high school diploma or its equivalent. Forty-nine (27%) graduated high school and another 19 (11%) earned a GED. Slightly fewer (55 or 31%) had some high school education without graduating. Only 5 (<3%) respondents failed to reach high school. Thus, one-third of the respondents did not possess a high school education. Three interviewees earned a technical school certification and another 27 took some college level courses without graduating (combined 17%). Interestingly, 54 (30%) interviewees declared that they received some sort of vocational training, indicating at least an attempt to acquire useful job skills. Fourteen respondents (8%) indicated that they had received a college degree. Seven respondents stated that they were currently in school or working towards an educational degree.



Employment

It is no surprise that our data indicates that the vast majority of homeless persons at the shelter were unemployed. One hundred twenty-nine (73%) were not employed at the time the survey was conducted. However, 93 interviewees, or 72% of those unemployed indicated that they were looking for work. Of those that answered that they were currently employed (48, or 27%), 22 specified that their work was seasonal or temporary. Only 15 indicated that their work was permanent.

Income

Only seven respondents indicated that they received Supplemental Security Income. Only 3 more indicated that they received Social Security Disability Insurance. No one interviewed claimed to be on General Assistance or TANF. No one received unemployment benefits. Only 2 respondents indicated that they received food stamps, and two more indicated that they received income from veterans' benefits. These statistics reveal the utter incongruence between governmental programs aimed at helping disadvantaged persons and the actual receipt of those programs.

Programs must be implemented to match qualifying homeless individuals with the programs that may help them out of their current homeless episode. Like veterans qualifying for federal monies, homeless persons not taking advantage of available federal funds creates an added but unnecessary burden on local agencies and services.

Disability

When asked if the interviewee had a disability of long duration, the most common response was "no." Eighty-four (47%) indicated that they were not chronically disabled. Another 63 (38%) answered in the affirmative, indicating that they were disabled over a long period of time. Twenty-nine (16%) respondents did not know if they were disabled or did not understand how to answer the question.

When asked how their overall health compared to other people of the same age, 53 (30%) answered “Good” and 23 (13%) more answered “Very Good.” Nineteen (11%) answered “Excellent” and another 46 (26%) respondents answered “Fair.” Only 24 (14%) answered “Poor.” Roughly 1 in 6 saw their health conditions as below other persons of the same age.

Reasons for Homeless Spell

When asked what the primary reason was for their current homeless spell, the plurality (38 or 21.5%) indicated that a recent loss of job and income resulted in the loss of their shelter. Twenty-one (12%) answered that substance abuse was the primary reason for their current episode. Nineteen (11%) indicated that they were recently discharged from various institutions and had no place to go upon leaving their respective facility. Twelve (7%) indicated that a medical condition caused them to seek refuge in the emergency shelter and another 11 (6%) interviewees considered their poor mental health to be the primary cause.

A small proportion cited structural problems as the reason for their current homeless stretch. Seventeen (nearly 10%) respondents indicated that a lack of affordable housing left them homeless and another 11 (6%) indicated that a lack of job opportunities precluded them from being gainfully employed and housed.

REASONS FOR HOMELESS SPELL	#	%
Loss of Job	38	21.5
Substance abuse	21	12
Institutional discharge	19	11
Lack of housing	17	10
Medical Condition	12	7
Eviction	12	7
Mental Health	11	6
Underemployment	11	6
Divorce	10	5.5
Domestic Violence Victim	8	4.5
Criminal Activity	4	2
Loss of transportation	4	2
Other	9	5

Chronicity

Out of 176 interviewees, 87, or half of them declared themselves to be chronically homeless. Chronically homeless is the term used to describe homeless persons that were either homeless for more than a year or had more than three homeless spells over the last four years. This figure is probably higher than the actual proportion, as the chronically homeless were more likely to be selected for an interview, as they spent more nights in the shelter than those residents who were not chronically homeless. With the possibility

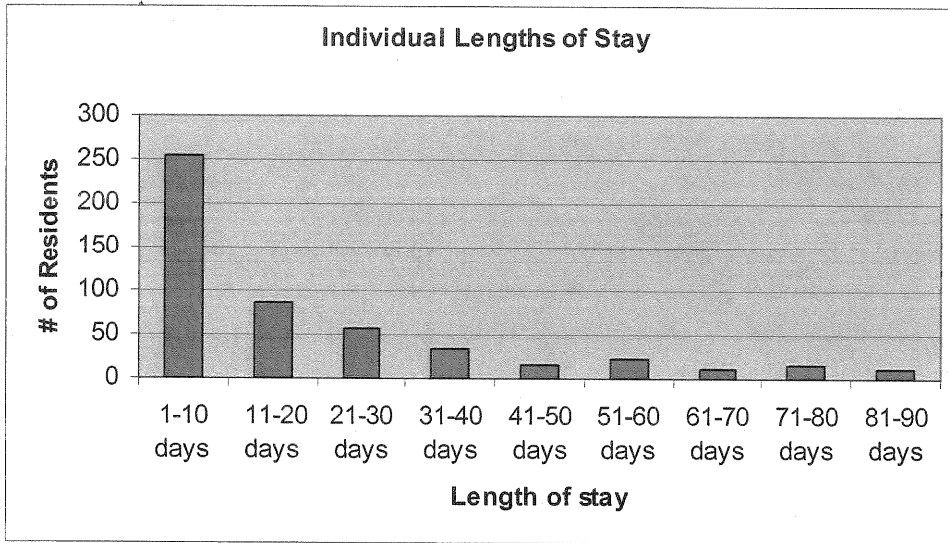
of such a skewed data set, the entry data was reorganized to determine lengths of stay for each resident.

Many respondents indicated that their current homeless spell was their first. Of the 176 interviewees, 58 (33%) indicated that their current episode was their first.

Individual Lengths of Stay

Of the 498 total residents that stayed at least one night in the shelter, over half stayed less than 10 days. Another fifth stayed less than 20 days. Thus, more than two-thirds of the total population stayed at the shelter less than three weeks. However, 35 residents stayed at the shelter for two or more of the three months of the shelter’s operation. Sixty-five residents spent at least half of the nights between January 1 and March 29. On any given night, then, anywhere from a quarter to half of the residents were ‘regulars,’ spending more nights in the shelter than away from it. The average length of stay was 19 days.

Length of stay	# of Residents
1-10	254
11-20	86
21-30	55
31-40	32
41-50	16
51-60	22
61-70	10
71-80	14
81-90	11



It is difficult to ascertain why so many residents stayed less than 10 days. Anecdotally, the staff knew 8 people that moved into their own places and another 8 began lodging with family and friends. A couple entered themselves into a mental health facility and at least two more entered an inpatient detoxification center. Most had no idea where they were going to go or where they were going to sleep.

Policy Recommendations

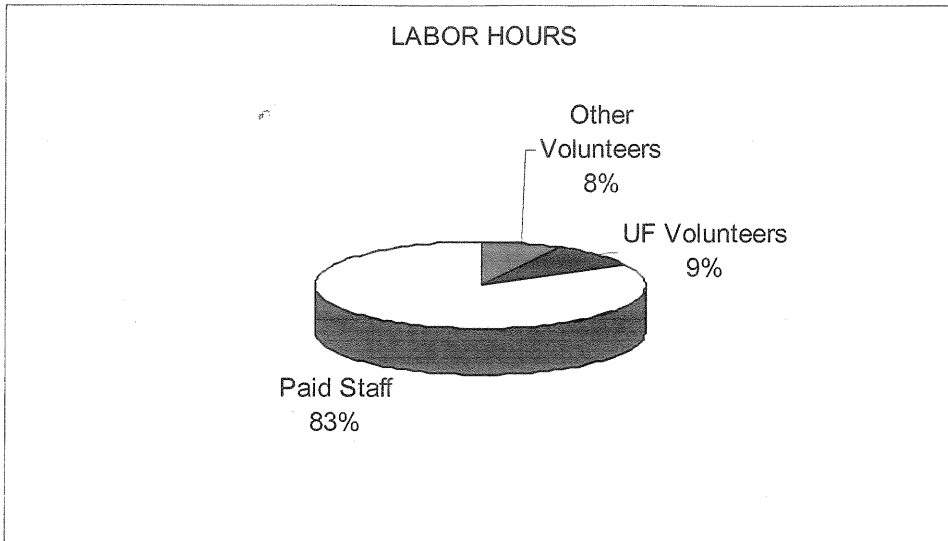
The miniscule numbers of homeless persons receiving government money for which they qualify suggests that homeless persons do not have the knowledge or resources to receive such aid. It would behoove local policymakers to implement programs to match qualified homeless persons with government monies earmarked for their use. Such a program would literally pay for itself in local funds saved from incoming federal money.

The large proportion of homeless residents at HTEC with a history of juvenile institutionalization mandates that discharge planning be a top priority of future policy considerations. The fact that an estimated one quarter of Gainesville's homeless population fits into this category demands that attention be given to discharge policies currently in place regarding newly emancipated youths. Job training and placement and temporary housing for the recently discharged will reduce the overall homeless population significantly.

Considering the large numbers of chronically homeless that called HTEC home for nearly the entire span of its operation, the most pressing need is for supportive or permanent housing for this group. Otherwise, the chronically homeless will occupy the lion's share of beds in future emergency or supplemental shelters. The large numbers of chronically homeless at HTEC indicates the pressing need for such programs.

There is an obvious need for an emergency shelter in the Gainesville area, especially considering that one-third of the interviewed residents indicated that their current episode was their first homeless stint. A small-scale, emergency shelter designed for first-time homeless persons is certainly merited, and the necessary funds for such a shelter would be insignificant compared to the HTEC Supplemental Cold Weather Shelter. With the introduction of supportive and permanent housing for the chronically homeless, the overall shelter population would be greatly reduced, as the numbers of chronically homeless persons would be reduced drastically.

Moreover, labor costs would be comparatively small, as volunteers from various local organizations (UF, GHS, etc.) strongly complimented the paid staff at HTEC and would provide a large labor pool for future emergency shelter needs. Over 450 volunteer hours were logged from these various organizations at HTEC. In fact, on a couple of nights, the shelter was actually overstaffed with volunteers



In all, volunteer hours accounted for nearly a fifth of the overall labor hours logged. We are confident that future shelters will at least maintain these rates, especially if advance notice is given to various volunteer organizations at the University and in the community. For the HTEC shelter, no advance notice was given, and we received volunteers in more of an ad hoc fashion.

While the need for an emergency shelter is apparent, the need for a supplemental shelter for the colder nights specifically is not merited from the data. Cold nights and warm nights exhibited nearly identical bed counts. Homeless persons were no more likely to sleep within the shelter on below freezing nights as they were on nights above 55°F. However, the fact that 255 people needed the shelter for less than 10 days suggests that a full-time emergency shelter be available for the non-chronic homeless.