



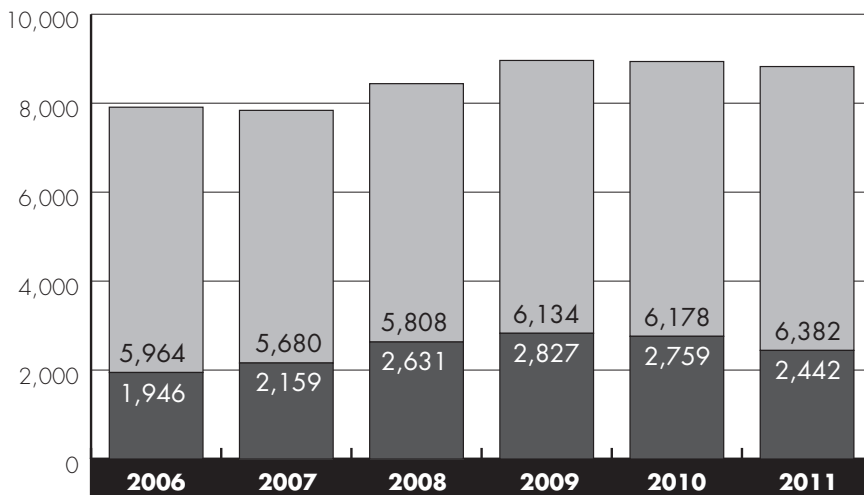
THE ROLE OF SHELTER IN ADDRESSING HOMELESSNESS:

A REALISTIC LOOK AT THE NEED

OUR MISSION

Seattle/King County Coalition on Homelessness works collaboratively to ensure safety and survival for people who are homeless, and to end the crisis of homelessness in our region.

King County One Night Count Data 2006-2011



Results of January 28, 2011
One Night Count of people
who are homeless

JANUARY 28, 2011

People counted outside between 2-5 a.m.	2,442
People in shelters	2,611
People in transitional housing	3,771
TOTAL	8,824

At least 8,824 people were homeless on this one night in King County.

Shelter is a basic human need, whether it is found in a house, an apartment, a tent or a church basement.

Between 2006 and 2011, our annual One Night Count of people without shelter documented between 1,946 and 2,827 people sleeping outside. **During our last six January counts, we have counted an average of 2,461 people without shelter overnight.**

King County's shelters are at capacity each night. The number of people we count indoors tells us how many people an overloaded system can accommodate. The people we count outdoors reflect our relative success or failure in meeting the needs of all people without housing. We have abundant evidence that when people have the opportunity to move into shelter or housing that meets their needs, they are more than willing to do so. The problem we face is one of capacity.



Our community should offer a place inside for everyone who is outside.



BECAUSE EVERYONE COUNTS

Do not succumb to the false dichotomy of "Shelter vs. Housing"

We know shelter, survival services and interim housing are already part of the continuum.

For several years, our leaders have put every new dollar into housing. There has been minimal investment in survival services, and there are very limited opportunities for 24-hour shelter or interim housing. However, survival services – food, hygiene, overnight and day shelters, urgent primary and mental health care – are fundamental to our task of ending homelessness.



People are homeless 24 hours a day

We should recognize the real value of shelter in ending homelessness.

The primary purpose and intrinsic value of the shelter system lies in helping people survive. In shelters people can stabilize, engage with services, and secure pathways out of homelessness – provided there are places for them to move into. However, for single adults, most of the shelter available to them (64%) is in the form of overnight-only mats or beds.

To succeed, we must incorporate survival services into our systemic approach to ending homelessness by transforming the shelter system from a tattered safety net of overnight-only shelters to a model of 24-hour interim housing with on-site services tied to comprehensive street outreach.

Doing this will better assist people who are homeless to meet their emergency needs, while working with them to secure stable, appropriate housing. Such models exist in our region on a limited basis, and have demonstrated success here and in other parts of the nation. This kind of systemic change, however, can only be accomplished with greater investment in survival services. The return on investment will be significant: fewer people on the street, greater ability to transition people to federal entitlement benefits and to housing with an appropriate level of services.

Shorten shelter stays by creating appropriate housing

The Committee to End Homelessness has acknowledged that a number of shelters have residents who have been there for many years. Length of stay in shelter is due to limited access to affordable and appropriate housing, rather than a result of shortcomings of shelters or the people who stay in them. At the direction of local funders, the newest permanent supportive housing projects give priority to people who are outside on the street or use very expensive public services. If we want people to spend less time in shelter, we have to ensure that new housing resources are available to those people in shelter.

People without shelter need somewhere to be

The reality is that we do not have enough shelter. We do not have enough housing. As long as our shelter system cannot meet the need, people who are homeless will make do by camping. Individuals, informal groups, and organized camps can and do exist peacefully on public property. Local governments should work with other stakeholders to make public property available to members of the public who are homeless. Let us support our neighbors who are forced to live in public places, and ensure that they are not harassed. Allow people to remain where they have chosen to be, as long as they are not disturbing the peace or interfering with the rights of others. We must find mutually acceptable solutions that keep people safe, protect their rights, and advance our shared goal of ending homelessness.

