
Meeting Basic Human Needs-- Emergency Shelter, Hunger & Clothing

Emergency Shelter: Description

Shelter, food and clothing are basic human needs. Individuals or families may need emergency shelter as a result of a natural disaster or fire, a family crisis, or homelessness. HUD defines a chronically homeless person as “an unaccompanied homeless individual with a disabling condition who has either been continuously homeless for a year or more or has had at least four episodes of homelessness in the past three years.” A disabling condition is defined as a “diagnosable substance use disorder, serious mental illness, developmental disability, or chronic physical illness or disability, including the co-occurrence of two or more of these conditions.”

Homelessness is a complex issue. Individuals experiencing homelessness often have a history of multiple, accumulated problems that can include chemical addictions, mental illness and emotional health issues, physical health issues, a lack of education, and limited job skills. A shortage of affordable housing creates an even greater challenge for the homeless.

Local emergency sheltering organizations have a waiting list and believe that only about 20-25% of the present need is being met. The community has a shortage of facilities to provide emergency family shelter. Programs that do provide physical shelter to the homeless are usually accompanied by support services including developing a case management plan, parenting classes, after-school tutoring, HIV education and testing, and building self-esteem.

Monroe County Fast Facts

- During the past year, 80% of the residents at The Rise transitional housing for domestic violence moved into affordable, safe, permanent housing. Six months later, 73% were still there.
- Through the PATH homeless outreach and assessment process, contact was made with over 200 persons experiencing homelessness or at-risk for homelessness due to serious mental illness and substance abuse problems.
- The number of affordable housing units increased by 27 in the past year; 20 from the City of Bloomington HAND Department, 4 from Habitat for Humanity, and 3 from Bloomington Restorations.
- Amethyst House increased the transitional housing for persons with addictions by 4 beds in the men’s program. (*Data from the Continuum of Care Report for Region 10 -- 2003.*)

Key Findings

Surveys and interviews were conducted with clients at several social service agencies, including Shelter Inc., Community Kitchen, Shalom Community Center, and Community Action Program. Spanish-speaking clients were well represented among the 42 responses.

- The major issues for many of the clients included paying the rent, finding a good job, paying for legal issues, getting a loan, paying for clothing and utilities, and dealing with stress anxiety and depression. Clients who lived in public housing complained about the noise, alcohol and drugs, and named the general environment as a major source of stress.
- Many of the individuals who were experiencing homelessness or hunger had gone through one or more “triggering” events – an illness, loss of a job, lack of insurance, a divorce, jail time, or domestic violence – that precipitated their current situation.
- Individuals who were able to access Medicaid, Food Stamps, Social Security and other supports were able to maintain a better standard of living than those who were not aware of or eligible for these programs.
- Most of the clients had an income below \$15,000, and an education level of high school or GED or below. Those with a higher level of education, but experiencing challenges, were usually experiencing a severe physical disability or had a history of mental illness.
- Most of the non-Spanish speaking clients had lived in Monroe County for at least several years. Several had gone to school here, and returned to seek employment.

Description–Hunger

Along with shelter, food is a fundamental human need. The 2001 Hunger and Homelessness Survey released by the U.S. Council of Mayors showed that the economic slowdown has led to an increase in demand for food assistance across the country. The cities included in the survey reported an average increase of 23% in requests for emergency food assistance. Slightly over half of the people requesting emergency food assistance were members of families. About 37% of the adults asking for food assistance were employed.

Monroe County Fast Facts

- In 2002, the Hoosier Hills Food Bank distributed food to more than 90 different organizations.
- In 2002, the Community Kitchen provided 128,281 meals including over 11,000 summer breakfasts; one third of the meals were provided to children under 18.
- The poverty rate for children under 18 is 11.8%, (2000) placing us 35th in the state.
- In 2003, out of 10,776 students enrolled in the Monroe County Community School Corporation, 3,084 received free or reduced lunch. For Richland Bean Blossom School Corporation, out of 2620 students, 403 received free or reduced lunch.

For additional statistics, please see the Supplement.

Key Findings

Households participating in the telephone survey were asked if they had enough money for food in the 12 months prior to the survey. Paying for food was a major problem for 2%, and a minor problem for 15%. About 13% of the clients surveyed at provider agencies reported that having enough money for food as a major problem; 46% said it was a minor problem.

The survey also asked if households had needed emergency or supplemental food assistance. This was a minor problem for 5%, and a major problem for 2% of the general households. Again, more of the clients surveyed reported difficulty in this area: 26% reported a minor problem; 7% said it was a major problem.

Having enough money for food	Major Problem	Minor Problem	Combined %
All survey households	2%	15%	17%
Non-student survey households with income < \$25,000	9%	30%	39%
Non-student survey households with income , \$15,000	19%	24%	43%
“Low-income” households	14%	36%	50%
Provider clients	13%	46%	59%

Needing emergency or supplemental food assistance	Major Problem	Minor Problem	Combined %
All survey households	2%	5%	7%
Non-student survey households with income < \$25,000	6%	17%	23%
Non-student survey households with income , \$15,000	5%	29%	34%
“Low-income” households	6%	25%	31%
Provider clients	7%	26%	33%

The data from key informants and service providers indicates that:

- Additional free food pantries and targeted food pantries are needed, including pantries to serve the elderly and HIV/AIDS patients. These additional pantries must be evenly distributed geographically, since many individuals in need of food have transportation limitations. It is also suggested that these pantries should not require proof of need (already the policy of Community Kitchen) and that additional non-food household supplies should be stocked in the same locations.
- Some providers expressed an interest in having the Community Action Program (CAP) handle government-supplied food commodities, as it has in the past. However, in practice it was found that the food the state required clients to choose from was higher in calories and often not as nutritious as food generally available at food pantries. Studies showed almost half of the food commodities were wasted and the program lost money.
- Some providers would like to see the development of a “food roundtable” where providers can meet and discuss common issues, programs, concerns, and opportunities.

Description – Clothing

A number of resources exist to supply individuals and families with basic clothing. The American Red Cross provides clothing and household necessities to families who have lost their belongings to disasters like tornados and fires. The Salvation Army, Goodwill, Opportunity House and several other thrift shops have low cost apparel available and many provide vouchers to other provider agencies for use by clients in need. Many of the local faith-based organizations will help individuals in need of clothing as well.

Key Findings

When asked if finding money to buy needed clothing and shoes was an issue, 5% of the general population surveyed said it was a major problem; 16% said it was a minor

problem. Respondents in the client group had more difficulty with this item; 29% said it was a major problem, and 33% said it was a minor problem.

Having enough money to buy needed clothing or shoes?	Major Problem	Minor Problem	Combined %
All survey households	5%	16%	21%
Non-student survey households with income < \$25,000	15%	32%	47%
Non-student survey households with income , \$15,000	19%	28%	47%
“Low-income” households	17%	33%	50%
Provider clients	29%	33%	62%

Community Resources

- The Shalom Center was started as a partnership among social service providers and the faith community to provide homeless individuals with a place to build job skills, and have a physical address, telephone number and email address while seeking employment.
- The vision of the Monroe County Housing Network, a consortium of housing service providers and others interested in the issues surrounding homelessness, is that everyone has stable, decent affordable housing. To achieve this vision, members work together to obtain additional funding for service providers, gather accurate information about the homeless population in Monroe County, and generally address the issues of poverty, housing, and homelessness.
- Our community is fortunate to have an excellent network of agencies attending to the needs of the hungry. The Hoosier Hills Food Bank (HHFB) distributes food to almost 100 provider agencies, food pantries and soup kitchens, including Community Kitchen and MCUM. The HHFB Meal Share food recovery program recaptures usable food from area restaurants and institutions like Indiana University and Bloomington Hospital. The food bank has made many recent improvements in food handling and storage, including larger modern coolers, refrigerated trucks, and scanning equipment. Partnerships with other agencies, farmers and home gardeners ensure a supply of fresh garden vegetables in season. Specialized pantries like Mother Hubbard’s Cupboard redistribute food to people who need it, focusing on healthy food; organic, natural and whole foods; nutrition information and garden education.
- The Community Kitchen provides nutritious meals to people experiencing hunger. No proof of eligibility is required. The Community Kitchen opened a

satellite facility near Crestmont public housing to be able to reach others who could not get transportation to the Rogers Street site.

Places to Start

- Further develop a concerted and coordinated community effort to address some of the root causes of homelessness and hunger in our community.
- Ensure that the resources are available to provide stable funding for basic operating support for organizations providing effective services to those experiencing homelessness and hunger.
- Expand the community capacity for providing emergency shelter to individuals and families. The recent closing of Shelter Inc. created an even larger gap in addressing these needs, and other agencies are working to increase their capacities.
- Explore the feasibility of offering expanded locations for food pantries.