

# COUNT US IN

## King County's Point-In-Time Count of Homeless Young People

2012 Update

July 12, 2012





## SUMMARY

In King County, Washington, 685 youth and young adults were homeless or unstably housed on May 16, 2012. The count was conducted by a group of youth service providers and key community member from across the county. Through a variety of outreach methods to identify youth who might be homeless, a survey was conducted to produce an unduplicated count of homeless and unstably housed youth. Data was also drawn from Safe Harbors, the county's homeless management information system, to create a profile of youth homelessness in King County.

A total of 685 youth and young adults ages 13 to 25 were identified. Of these, 408 were staying in shelter or transitional housing programs, and 277 were surveyed at program sites and other places that homeless youth frequent. Of the 277 surveyed youth, 81 were literally homeless, 70 were imminently losing their housing and 126 were unstably housed.

Minors made up 21% of the total, 55% were female and 62% were people of color. Most youth in shelter or housing programs (67%) were in programs designed for youth. The youth and young adults counted by the survey differed from those in shelter or transitional housing. A higher percentage of survey youth were minors, male and African American, Asian or multiracial and from South Seattle or South King County.

The Count Us In collaboration will continue to improve outreach and survey methods for future counts. The information produced by this project will be useful in planning for better addressing youth and young adult homelessness in King County.

## **INTRODUCTION**

On May 25, 2011, a collaboration of multiple homeless youth service providers and key community members from across the county orchestrated a synchronized event called “Count Us In.” The goal was to achieve a more accurate count of the number of homeless and unstably housed youth in King County. A total of 261 homeless youth were counted, with at least 50 of them were sleeping on the streets the night before the count.

For May 16, 2012, lessons learned in this initial count were incorporated into more extensive planning resulting in more effective outreach strategies and an improved survey investment. In addition, data from King County’s HMIS was used to identify the number of youth and young adults staying in homeless programs the night before the survey was administered. This provides a more comprehensive picture of homelessness among young people in King County.

### **Homelessness in King County**

Youth and young adult homelessness is prevalent in King County. An estimated 5,000-10,000 youth experience homelessness during the course of each year in King County. On any given night, approximately 1,000 young people are homeless. These numbers are estimates, and we do not have a good grasp of the full scale of youth/young adults experiencing homelessness<sup>1</sup>. Count Us In is an attempt to develop specific sources of data on homelessness among our community’s young people.

### **Methodology**

A steering committee began meeting monthly starting in October of 2011 in preparation for the May 16, 2012 Count Us In. The steering committee included key nonprofit providers, the United Way of King County, and the City of Seattle. The committee proposed building on the 2011 Count Us In pilot by adding new providers in key demographic areas, expanding count methodology, and including a data pull from Safe Harbors HMIS system.

Nine agencies in the King County homeless youth continuum of care participated in 2011 and 2012: Auburn Youth Resources, Friends of Youth, Neighborcare Health’s 45th Street Youth Clinic, New Horizons

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<sup>1</sup> King County Committee To End Homelessness, Priority Action Steps to Prevent and End Youth and Young Adult Homelessness: An Implementation Plan

Ministries, Peace for the Streets by Kids from the Streets, Seattle Parks and Recreation with the City of Seattle Human Services Department, Teen Feed, YMCA Youth and Young Adult Services, and YouthCare.

For the 2012 count, the City of Seattle Human Services Department organized the participation of seven additional agencies serving youth and families located in South Seattle – the most ethnically and racially diverse area of King County by zip code and an area with historically few resources available to unstably housed, homeless youth and young adults. These additional agencies are: Asian Counseling and Referral Service, Atlantic Street Center, Consejo Counseling and Referral Services, People of Color Against Aids Network/Communities United Rainier Beach (POCAAN/CURB), Southeast Youth and Family Services, Therapeutic Health Services, and the Union Gospel Mission. Efforts were also made to involve the King County Library System, with branches across the county. This partnership is anticipated to start in 2013.

One unique element of the 2012 Count Us In was the interdisciplinary partnership between agencies in the homeless youth continuum of care and agencies serving youth and families without an explicit focus on homelessness. The interest of this broad spectrum of agencies to count homeless and unstably housed youth in a way that is appropriate and inclusive for both youths who identify as homeless and those who don't, led to an expansion in the count methodology.

Count Us In applied a combination of event-based counting through meal sites provided by community-based providers, surveys conducted over the phone with youth known to be unstably housed, and limited street outreach to survey youth who would not be drawn to an event or who were not currently engaged with providers. This methodology was intentionally designed to reach youth who are currently engaged in the homeless youth continuum of care, as well as homeless or unstably housed young people who are engaged in youth and family services in South Seattle, and youth who are disconnected from both of these systems.

Agencies determined what approach would best capture the youth they serve and the youth in their neighborhood – events, direct contact via phone calls or interviews, and/or street outreach. Each location's approach was coordinated through regular planning meetings leading up to the count. Sponsorship by the United Way of King County allowed each agency to receive a \$1,000 stipend toward incentives, staffing, or associated cost of the count. Posters and t-shirts were distributed to each location and circulated over email. Outreach workers and staff talked with youth in the weeks leading up to May 16th to encourage participation and communicate the purpose of the count.

The counting tool was a brief one-page survey developed with input from each participating agency. In order to provide an unduplicated count, the survey included a question that asked each youth to answer whether they had previously completed the survey that day. Count Us In training was provided before the event and covered how to administer the survey and strategies to reduce duplication – including completing the questions one-on-one with each young person. Surveys were designed to capture the numbers of youth literally homeless, unstably housed, and imminently at risk of losing housing. The straightforward nature of the survey tool was intended to reduce hesitation youth may have to a longer, more personal questionnaire.

The count period was limited to May 16th through 8pm. Each agency determined the best methods for reaching the maximum number of unstably housed/homeless youth in their community. For example, UGM went to high schools and middle schools after school and surveyed youth in the parking lot; POCAAN sat at the bus stop near their office and surveyed youth; Jefferson Community Center had a basketball tournament and BBQ led by youth; ACRS and SWY&F called youth; THS called youth and surveyed all the youth in their groups that day; and Atlantic St. and Van Asselt did a combined event at the community center as well as calling youth and surveying people who accessed services that day. By 9pm, each location reported the total number of youth who participated.

At the end of the month, the number of youth and young adults entered in shelters and transitional living programs on the night of May 15th was pulled from Safe Harbors, King County's Homelessness Management Information System. Surveys on which youth reported they stayed in a shelter or transitional living program the night before (May 15th) were removed from the survey count. The total number of youth counted as unstably housed or homeless in the 2012 Count Us In is the combined youth entered in the Safe Harbors system on the night of May 15th and surveys which identified the youth's housing status as literally homeless, unstably housed, or imminently at-risk of losing housing.

#### **TERMINOLOGY:**

**Sheltered/Survey youth:** For the purposes of this report, we refer to youth and young adults reflected in HMIS data as “**sheltered youth**”. This data included all May 15 residents of emergency shelters, transitional housing and permanent supportive housing who were between the ages of 13 and 25 and unaccompanied by a parent or adult guardian. We referred to youth and young adults who completed surveys during the Count Us In survey period on May 16 as “**survey youth**”. All participants ages 13-25 who identified themselves as literally homeless, unstably housed, or at

imminent risk of homelessness, and who did not stay in a homeless shelter/housing program the previous night are included.

### **Limitations**

The methodology used in this project produced a well-rounded picture of youth and young adult homelessness in King County. It is based on both service data and a comprehensive survey conducted by a broad range of youth service providers in many parts of the County. It documents a minimum count of youth in specific kinds of unacceptable housing situations in our community.

Limitations involve conclusions that can be drawn from the demographic profile of youth included in this data. The data reflects the profiles of youth who use participating programs. This might result in omitting youth who do not access services, who are outside the demographic or geographic reach of these programs and those who did not respond to the outreach methods employed.

The dataset does include a large sample of homeless and unstably housed youth in King County and therefore the demographic profile is meaningful. While there is certainly some bias toward youth connected in some way with this set of service programs, the number of youth covered by this data represents over 2/3 of previous estimates of the total point in time number. It is reasonable to use this demographic data as the best representation available of the profile of our homeless/unstably housed youth and young adult population with the knowledge that 300 or more youth were not included, and they may differ from the youth in this count.

## **RESULTS**

### **Survey Youth: Overall Count Us In Survey Statistics by Site**

Over 1000 surveys were completed for Count Us In. Surveys indicating the youth had already completed a survey or had stayed in a shelter or transitional housing program and surveys with invalid ages or incomplete screening data were not included in the analysis. All sites collected surveys from eligible youth. A total of 881 surveys were included, 277 of which indicated that the youth was literally homeless, unstably housed, or at imminent risk of homelessness.

Agency	Number eligible youth	Total participants	% eligible
New Horizons	15	24	63%
Teen Feed	24	45	53%
45 <sup>th</sup> St.. Clinic	3	9	33%
YMCA 2100	8	25	32%
YMCA Dale Turner	2	14	14%
YMCA Matt G.	1	22	5%
AYR	41	90	46%
PSKS	6	7	86%
FOY	15	33	45%
Orion Center	10	24	42%
ACRS	8	11	73%
Atlantic St Ctr	46	89	52%
Consejo	13	25	52%
Parks/Jefferson	18	125	14%
Parks/Rainier	4	44	9%
Parks/Van Asselt	2	35	6%
POCAAN	26	68	38%
SEYF	1	4	25%
THS/CYFS	25	48	52%
Union Gospel	9	139	6%
	277	881	31%

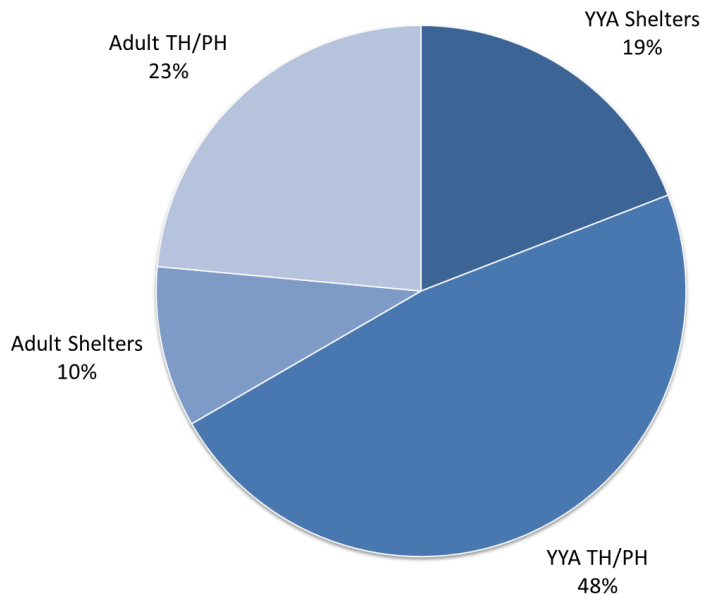
The 277 surveys from youth who were unstably housed or homeless are included in the remaining analysis, of which 54.9% were from the South Seattle count.

### **Sheltered Youth: HMIS Data**

Data from the Safe Harbors HMIS was also pulled for the night prior to the count to correspond with the “where you stayed last night” question on the survey that was used to determine housing status. A total of 408 people ages 13-25 and unaccompanied by a parent or guardian were in shelter, transitional housing or permanent supportive housing for homeless people on the night of May 15. Most unaccompanied youth and young adults were staying in programs targeting youth.



**Two thirds of sheltered youth stayed in youth/young adult programs**



**All Youth and Young Adults: Demographic Profile**

On the night of May 15, 2012, 685 youth and young adults, ages 13 to 25 were homeless, unstably housed, or at imminent risk of homelessness in King County.

Of those, 277 were staying outdoors, were unstably housed or at imminent risk of homelessness, and 408 were in shelter or transitional housing programs. Minors made up 21% of the total, 55% were female and 62% were people of color. The sheltered group is larger than the survey group.

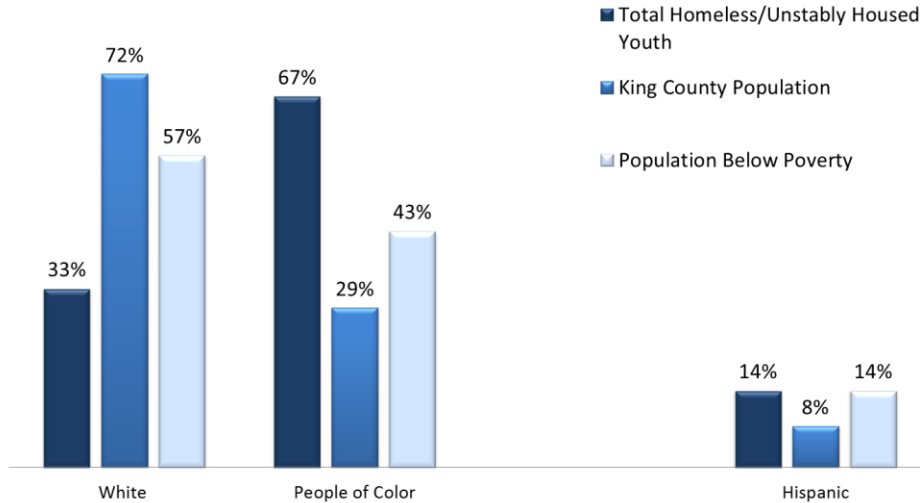
Total Sheltered and Survey Youth	
Survey	277
Sheltered	408
Total # of Clients	685

<b>Gender</b>	
Female	<b>374</b>
Male	<b>289</b>
Transgender (survey only)	<b>4</b>
Other	<b>8</b>
Unknown/refused	<b>10</b>

<b>Age</b>	<b>Number of Youth</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Number of Youth</b>
13	<b>15</b>	18	<b>69</b>
14	<b>13</b>	19	<b>71</b>
15	<b>26</b>	20	<b>87</b>
16	<b>28</b>	21	<b>97</b>
17	<b>63</b>	22	<b>80</b>
Minors	<b>145</b>	23	<b>61</b>
		24	<b>51</b>
		25	<b>24</b>
		Young Adults	<b>540</b>

<b>Ethnicity</b>	
Hispanic	<b>95</b>
Non-Hispanic	<b>562</b>
Unknown	<b>28</b>
<b>Race</b>	
Asian	<b>35</b>
African-American	<b>235</b>
Pacific Islander/Hawaiian	<b>11</b>
Native American	<b>35</b>
Caucasian/White	<b>205</b>
Multi-Racial	<b>89</b>
Other	<b>20</b>
Unknown	<b>55</b>

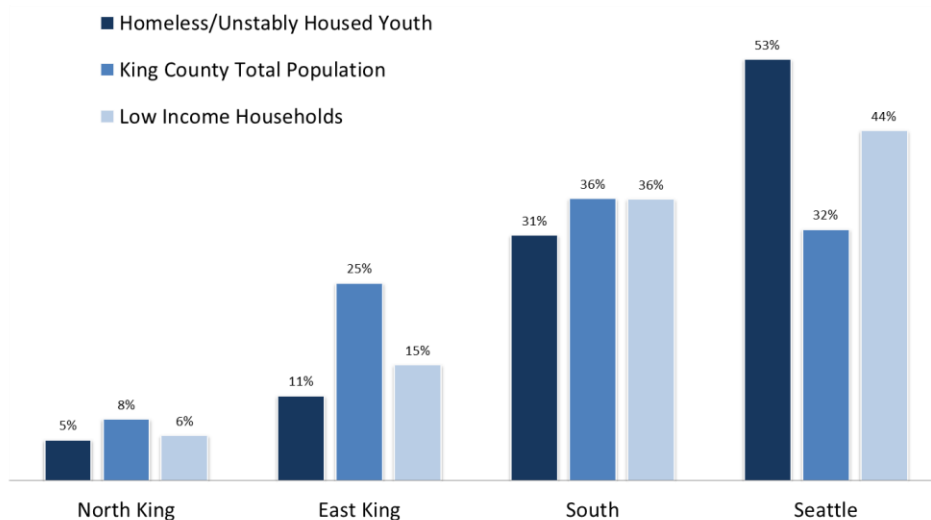
**People of Color are Disproportionately Represented in the Homeless and Unstably Housed Youth and Young Adult Population in King County**



**Location of Last Permanent Residence**

Youth and young adults from Seattle are disproportionately represented in the youth population that is homeless, unstably housed, or at imminent risk of homelessness. Over one third were from Seattle and 31% were from South King County. This is based on both sheltered and survey youth who indicated a zip code in King County as their last stable residence.

**Youth from Seattle are disproportionately represented in the homeless/unstably housed youth population\***

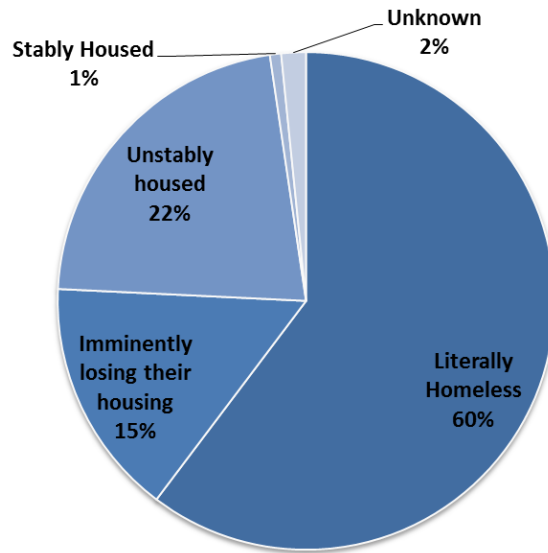


\* Only youth with last stable residences in King County are included

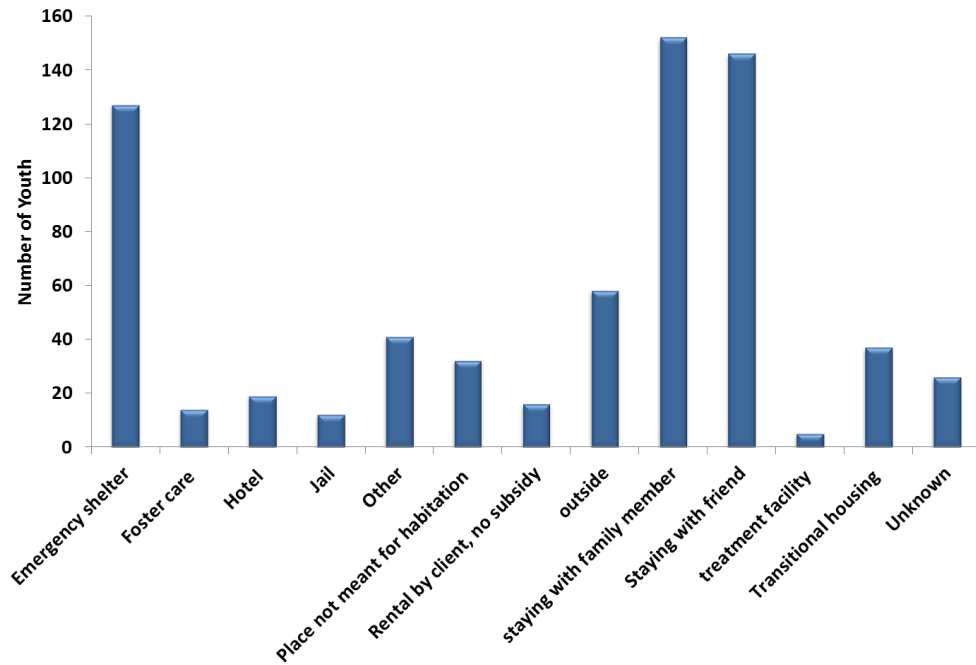
## Housing Status

Housing status is based on the nature of the place where the youth stayed on the night before taking the Count Us In Survey; or on the night before entering a shelter or housing program.

**Housing Status of Sheltered and Survey Youth**



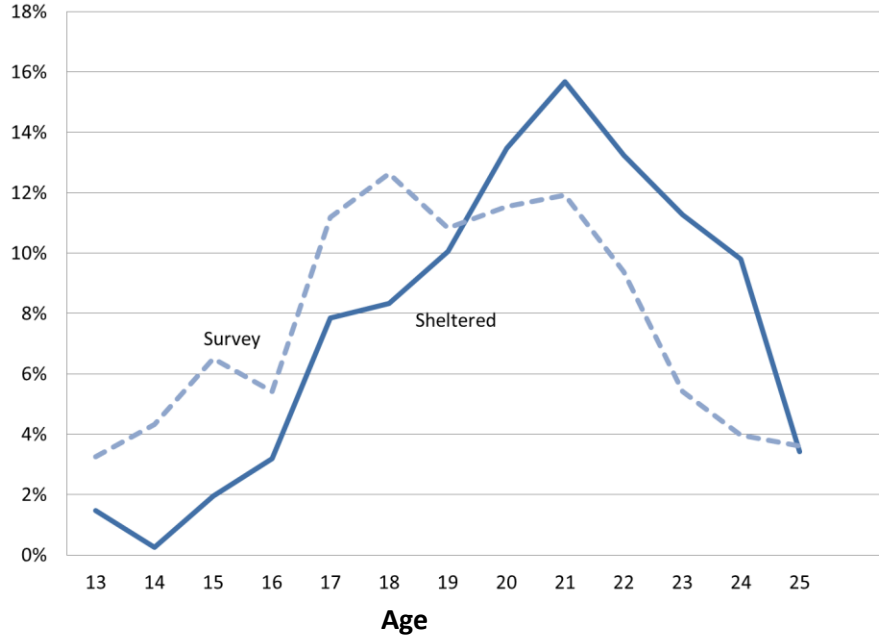
**Place slept before survey or program entry**



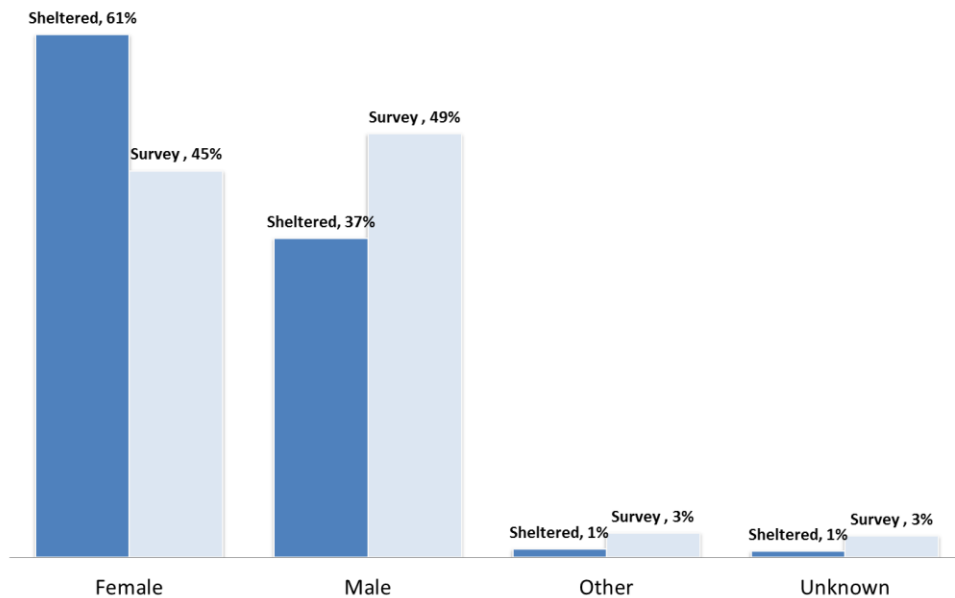
### Sheltered versus Survey

The youth and young adults counted by the survey differed from those in shelter or transitional housing. A higher percentage of survey youth were minors, male and African American, Asian or multiracial and from South Seattle or South King County.

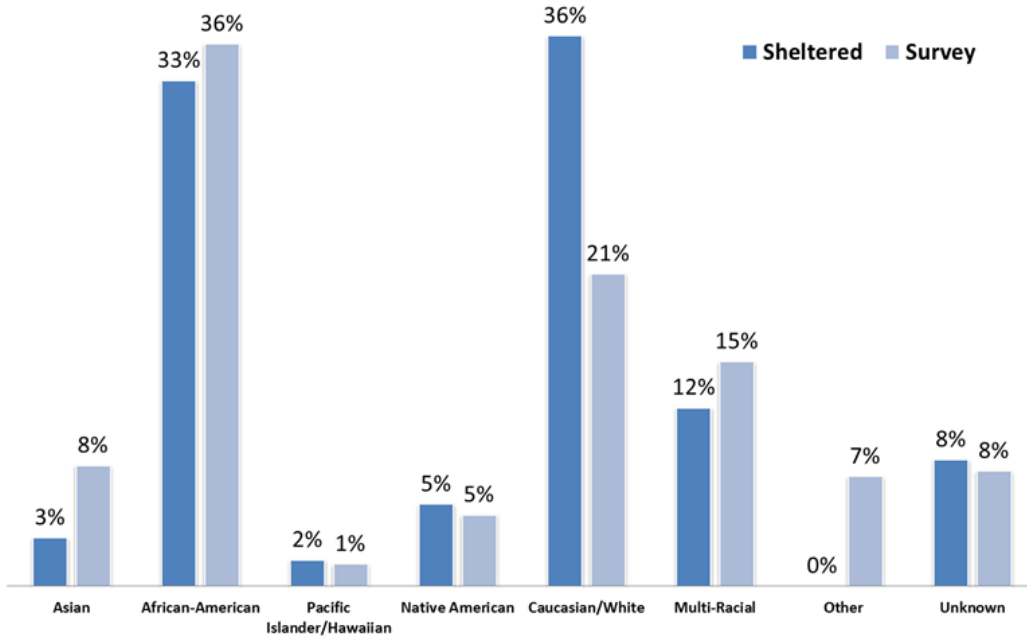
**A higher percentage of survey youth are minors**



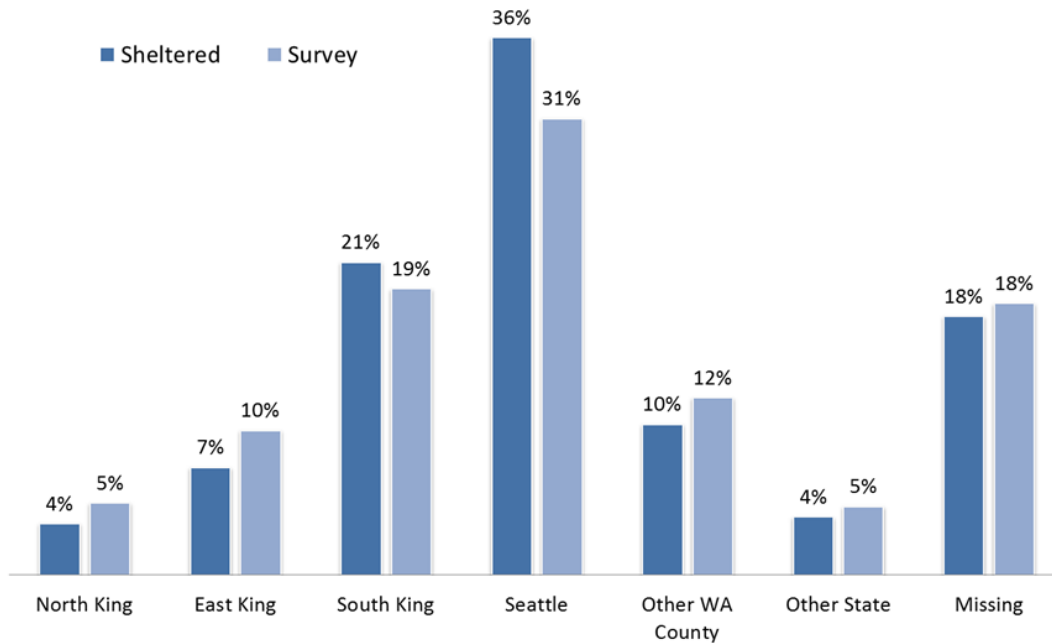
**A larger percentage of survey youth are male**



**A larger percentage of unsheltered youth are youth of color**



**A larger percentage of survey youth come from Seattle and South King County**



## **Discussion**

This data tells us that 685 youth and young adults are homeless in King County and at least 277 youth are without stable housing or access to shelter/housing services. Many youth are being served by both youth specific programs and adult programs. A large number of youth are literally homeless and many more are in need of prevention services to avoid time on the street with all its risks for vulnerable young people. Minors make up a larger portion of the survey population than has been documented in the past decade. Services for under 18 year old youth are scarce as is reflected in the fact that a larger percentage of survey youth are minors.

The disproportionate representation of youth of color, males and youth from Seattle and South King County in the survey population as compared to those using shelter or housing programs suggests specific prevention, outreach and access strategies to meet the needs of these populations. The large number of youth who were unstably housed with friends and family suggests prevention programming. Additional analyses of the data will help to target these strategies effectively.

## **DEBRIEFING AND NEXT STEPS**

A mandatory feedback session was held the following day to turn in hard copies of the surveys and debrief the count. Several strong positive themes emerged:

- Sites universally supported the length of the survey tool, commenting that it was easy to administer and brief enough that youth were willing to complete it.
- The funding awarded to each agency allowed sites flexibility to make the best use of the stipend – purchasing incentives, food, or paying youth to conduct outreach.
- Handouts, posters and materials provided by the steering committee assisted each location in spreading the word.
- Facebook was utilized with success as an outreach tool.
- Clear and regular communication by the steering committee made it easy for agencies to participate, especially agencies for which homeless youth weren't explicitly a service focus.

## **Next Steps**

In addition, there was enthusiasm during the feedback session around opportunities for the 2013 count:

- Continue thinking around marketing the count to youth who may not identify as homeless –avoiding the stigma of a “homeless youth count.”
- Improve the screening of surveys, reducing inadmissible surveys and lost data.
- Continue refining the survey tool to improve the accuracy of responses.
- Create a single point of information about the count, i.e. a website with all count locations.
- Continue refining the planning structure to improve transparency, communication and accessibility of agency participation.
- Continue expanding the count’s reach through additional partnerships, such as: libraries, school districts and use McKinney Vento liaisons, juvenile detention, faith community partners, Police Departments and Street Outreach Workers.

## **CONCLUSION**

The 2012 Count Us In point in time count was successful in capturing a more complete picture of youth and young adult homelessness in Seattle and King County. Certainly many youth in unstable living situations or literally homeless were not reached by the survey, so ongoing development of survey methods is important and recognition of the limitations of the data must be emphasized.

Based on this dataset, much can be learned about the nature and extent of homelessness among young people. Further analysis of the data will provide information on the housing history and service needs of survey youth as well as the nature of homelessness for various segments of the population. This information will be used to inform planning for an effective response to youth homelessness.



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The City of Seattle Human Services Department, Teen Feed, YouthCare, and survey agency partners:

New Horizons  
Teen Feed  
45th St. Clinic  
YMCA  
Auburn Youth Resources  
Peace for the Streets by Kids From the Streets  
Friends of Youth  
YouthCare/Orion Center  
Asian Counseling and Referral Service  
Atlantic Street Center  
Consejo Counseling and Referral Service  
Seattle Department of Parks and Recreation  
People of Color Against AIDS Network  
Southeast Youth and Family Services  
Therapeutic Health Services/Central Youth and Family Services  
Union Gospel Mission

