

A Snapshot of Homelessness: 2011

A report on the 2011 Homeless Point-In-Time Count for the South Carolina counties of: Aiken, Allendale, Bamberg, Barnwell, Calhoun, Chester, Fairfield, Kershaw, Lancaster, Lexington, Newberry, Orangeburg, Richland, and York.

**A report by the Midlands Area Consortium for the Homeless, United Way
of the Midlands, & data by the SC Budget and Control Board Office of
Research and Statistics
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www.midlandshomeless.com**



Section I – Overview

South Carolina is a rural state with areas of deep, persistent poverty, unemployment, and disparities in access to opportunity. Homelessness, an extreme form of poverty, presents unique challenges for communities. The Midlands Area Consortium for the Homeless is a 501c3 established in 1994 to serve as a planning coalition to improve services and housing for people who are homeless in the counties it serves: Aiken, Allendale, Bamberg, Barnwell, Calhoun, Chester, Fairfield, Kershaw, Lancaster, Lexington, Newberry, Orangeburg, Richland, and York. MACH is an all volunteer organization.¹

Every two years the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) requires that communities that receive federal HUD homeless funding conduct a one-day ‘count’ of people experiencing homelessness during the last two weeks of January. This report summarizes the efforts of the 2011 Point-in-time Homeless Count conducted January 2011 by the Midlands Area Consortium for the Homeless (MACH). The report only offers a ‘snapshot’ of homelessness based on the efforts of volunteers and agencies serving homeless people on one day. The report is not intended to be an exact count of the number of homeless people in our community and uses a limited definition of homelessness. We would expect an annual count to be as much as 3-6 times higher depending on the county.

In the 2011 Homeless Count, **1,621** people in the 14 counties of MACH were identified as homeless using the narrow HUD definition, which does not include people who are ‘doubled-up’. This reflects an overall increase of 16% from one-day count conducted in 2009. The 2011 ‘count’ identified people as homeless if they were in the following conditions on January 27, 2011:

- currently living on the street
- staying in emergency or transitional shelter
- temporarily in a hospital or psychiatric hospital that will have nowhere to live upon release

Note that the following living conditions also fall into the HUD definition of homelessness, but few if any people were identified due to various challenges with these types of locations:

- living in substandard housing or housing not fit for human habitation such as housing without running water or electricity
- temporarily living in a hotel or motel paid by someone else (voucher)

Of the **1,621** people reported identified as homeless:

- **78.4% of those responding reported living in a MACH county when they become homeless**
- **1 in 4 adults reported having a disability (26.6%)**

¹ . Visit MACH’s website for more information: www.midlandshomeless.com.

- **1 in 5 homeless adults were veterans (19.3%)**
- **1 in 4 were people living in families (24.9%)**
- **16% of the homeless population was under the age of 18 including 138 children under the age of five years old.**
- **Of adults, 68.7% were male and 30.8% were female.**
- **Homelessness increased in the Midlands by 17% in the last two years**
- **Of the four homeless coalitions in South Carolina, MACH reported the highest numbers of homeless people during the 2011 point-in-time count:**

Coalition	Area Covered	2011 Count Total
Low Country Consortium	Charleston and surrounding areas	647
Eastern Carolina Homeless Consortium (ECHO)	Florence, Sumter, Myrtle Beach and surrounding areas.	1,160
Upstate Coalition	Greenville, Spartanburg, and surrounding areas	1,389
Midlands Area Consortium for the Homeless (MACH)	York, Midlands, to Aiken	1,621

Note – as of 6/12/11 the Lowcountry data is still under review.

The 2011 Count used data from one-on-one surveys with people on the streets and information collected by shelter and housing providers. The 2011 Homeless Count was the fourth state-wide count conducted in South Carolina. The four continuums in the state used a common methodology and forms.

Many lessons were learned from the 2011 Count that will be used to improve the quality of future counts. The Count would not have been possible without the dedicated service providers, passionate volunteers, and most importantly the people currently experiencing homelessness that implemented the count and completed surveys.

Section II - Methodology of the 2011 Count

Conducting homeless counts are challenging and while point in time data provides a helpful snapshot of community homelessness, it is a limited view. For example, point-in-time counts tend to identify people who have been homeless for longer periods of time and undercount people experiencing short-term homelessness or people who live doubled up with other households (such as families). The data are further limited because identifying people to complete interviews can be difficult. Homeless people are a hidden population. Specific limitations of the local count include a lack of resources to undertake this complicated research--the 2011 Homeless Count was conducted almost entirely by volunteers. MACH received guidance and support through the SC State Homeless

Coalition (www.schomeless.org) including training on homeless counts and support from the SC Office of Research and Statistics (SCORS) which assisted with data analysis.

The 2011 Count relied on three sources of data: volunteers interviewed homeless people on the street or in temporary shelters; some agencies completed surveys about clients in their shelters and other agencies provided data on homeless clients via the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS). HMIS is an internet based data system administered by Richland County government for the 14 counties of MACH funded by a HUD grant. Both HMIS and paper surveys identified people who met the narrow HUD definition of homelessness on January 27, 2011 and also requested identifying information such as name, Social Security number, and date of birth. The identifying information allowed the SC Office of Research and Statistics (SCORS) to un-duplicate the count; people were only 'counted' once even if they were housed at a shelter that reported their information through HMIS and they also completed an interview with a volunteer at a community location such as a soup kitchen. The surveys also collected descriptive information on length of time the person had been homeless and area of their last address.

The 2011 Homeless Count was the fourth state-wide count conducted in South Carolina. There are four homeless consortia in the state and although planning differed in each area based on the particular community, common survey forms and HMIS standards were used across the state. The level of community engagement in the Count varied by county: in rural areas it was especially difficult to identify homeless people.

Section III - Implementation

The 14-county MACH count was coordinated by Donny Supplee of United Way of Kershaw County. Volunteer county/cluster coordinators and Rebecca Frierson, MACH's HMIS coordinator, assisted with coordinating counts in the local areas. A 'train-the-trainer' session was conducted by Anita Floyd of United Way of the Midlands to ensure common methodology was used and to share best practice information. Local coordinators trained volunteers.

Sheltered Count

Information on people staying in emergency shelters or transitional housing was collected either through the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) or through surveys at agencies that do not participate in HMIS. Domestic violence shelters submitted information directly to SCORS rather than HMIS to protect the confidentiality of their clients.

Unsheltered Count

Data for the unsheltered count was collected through face to face interviews with people living on the streets or in other places not fit for habitation. Trained volunteers, currently homeless people

volunteering with the count, and homeless service providers completed the surveys at places where people were likely to seek services (such as soup kitchens) and unsheltered locations (such as woods, under bridges, parking garages). Local law enforcement, homeless people, and outreach workers provided information on ‘known locations’ where homeless people were likely to be found. Individuals were interviewed between January 27th and January 31st. However, participants were asked to report where they had stayed on the actual point-in-time date of January 27th. To ensure that people were not ‘double counted,’ surveys collected sufficient identifying information to allow the SC Office of Research and Statistics (SCORS) to unduplicate the count.

The Friday morning after the ‘point-in-time’ count, breakfasts were held in Columbia and Rock Hill inviting people that would have been unsheltered the night before. The breakfasts served a hot meal, offered blankets and personal care items (toothpaste, soap, etc), and gave volunteers the opportunity to complete surveys with people that may have been missed the evening before. Rock Hill also offered a ‘Project Connect’ event with haircuts, clothing, and other services.

The count did not specifically focus on people in abandoned and substandard housing due to the difficulties in identifying the locations, lack of resources to cover large geographic areas, and potential safety concerns. However, some areas did work to count people in these circumstances. Kershaw County mailed letters to utility companies asking for their help in identifying customers who had been without water, heat, or electricity for an extended period of time. However, coordinators found that they were unable to help because of confidentiality regulations or officials said once the utility was disconnected they had no way of knowing if anyone still lived in the residence.

In Orangeburg & Calhoun Counties, teams were sent to various locations: Salvation Army Thrift Store, Cooperative Churches & Ministries of Orangeburg, County Library and Post Office to survey people experiencing housing problems. Teams also went to two locations to survey people living behind local restaurants.

Section IV - Count Results

On January 27, 2011, **1,621** people were identified as homeless in the MACH service area using the narrow HUD definition of people who are literally homeless, i.e. in shelters, transitional housing or on the street.

Point-in-time Count Results for MACH	Percentage
Adults	75.0%
Children (younger than 18 years)	15.7%
Persons in Families with Dependent Children	24.9%
Chronically Homeless	14.7%
Mental Illness (adults)	12.6%
Substance Abuse (adults)	7.8%

Veterans (adults)	19.3%
Persons with HIV/AIDS (adults)	1.5%
Victims of Domestic Violence (adults)	14.8%

Note: Individuals may fall into more than one category and information is self-reported. Full data tables and copies of the sheltered and unsheltered survey forms are available for all areas of South Carolina at www.shomeless.org.

Significant changes in homelessness since the 2009 Count:

Of the 1,621 people identified as homeless on January 27, 2011 nearly half (43.3%) were living unsheltered. 702 individuals were identified without shelter living on the streets, woods, under bridges or other places not meant for human habitation. It should be noted that for safety and legal reasons volunteers did not enter abandoned or condemned buildings to conduct surveys. It is possible that people residing in those types of structure were surveyed at feeding or service locations.

Of those identified, 71.3% were African-American and 25.7% were Caucasian with smaller percentages of Hispanic and other racial groups identified. While 75% of the homeless population was single adults families with children comprised a quarter (24.9%) of those homeless. Children under five years old - the most critical years of development - comprised over half of the homeless children.

One in five (21.8%) were 53 years and older and nearly half (45.5%) were between 33-53 years old. 26.6% of adults were identified as having a disability with many having more than one disability.

We continue to understand that homeless people are our neighbors from our communities. For the one-day Count, 78.4% of those responding reported living in one of the MACH's 14 counties when they become homeless. This is similar to data from the Emergency Shelter in Columbia in which 85.9% of clients were living in South Carolina when they become homeless (USC, School of Medicine, Supportive Housing Services).

MACH County Data:

County	2011 One-day Total
Aiken	40
Allendale	19
Bamberg	0
Barnwell	0
Calhoun	1
Chester	9
Fairfield	26
Kershaw	95
Lancaster	8
Lexington	115
Newberry	8
Orangeburg	50
Richland	1,065
York	185
MACH on January 27, 2011	1,621

Section V - Concluding Thoughts

In 2009, the Homeless Emergency Assistance and Rapid Transition to Housing (HEARTH) Act was signed. HEARTH amends and reauthorizes the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act with substantial changes. When HEARTH is fully implemented it is expected the definition of homelessness will expand to include people who are doubled-up. The 2011 MACH Count did not identify people in doubled-up situations. However, we know that especially in rural areas without shelter resources people with housing issues resort to staying with others often in precarious situations. Like one count volunteer from Orangeburg said, "No one puts family members on the streets in Orangeburg. They stay in with family." HMIS data indicates that several of the clients entering shelters who live in rural areas were previously living with family members who evicted them (put them out). Thus, the shelters only see the people that had to leave. The majority remain in 'doubled-up' situations for years often going from place to place. This population is the hidden face of homelessness that you will not see in this report. They are reported by the Department of Education's McKinney Vento Homeless Program, who report on children in the school system who are living in 'double-up' or unaccompanied youth housing situation. The 2010 annual count in South Carolina was 10,820 school-aged children in public schools living in shelters, cars, severely substandard housing, motels, and doubled up. The Coalitions throughout the state will need to identify strategies to implement a future doubled-up count – as we do now – without resources.

Rural areas were generally not covered due to the difficulties in coordinating volunteers over large areas. For example, in Richland County 30 count teams were dispatched to areas in downtown Columbia, but only one team was sent to other areas of Richland County. Only four teams were dispatched to Lexington County resulting in a count of 115 people – most in residing in shelters. Several active campsites (evidence of fresh food, dry bedding, systems for water storage, and car battery hook-ups) were identified in West Columbia, Cayce, and Lexington, but people were not found at these sites during the daytime hours which count teams canvassed wooded areas. Identifying unsheltered people in rural areas is difficult and almost impossible with such limited volunteer resources and dense, unknown terrain. "The Count identified nearly 1,200 people in shelters and on the streets in the Midlands by really sending teams only to the downtown areas of Columbia – imagine how many people we could have found with the same coverage of Lexington and non-Columbia Richland County looking in unsheltered areas, substandard and abandoned housing", Richland and Lexington Count Coordinator.

We also know that wide-spread use of HMIS is one of the keys to a good count. The role of HMIS has increased each year we have conducted a state-wide homeless count. This year, all four of the

Coalitions used their HMIS to enter data for the sheltered and unsheltered populations. HMIS is not only a data collection tool, but it also supports the goal of communities producing an accurate one-day count. Thus, in all of the MACH counties HMIS should and needs to be the ‘central point of entry’ for all support services to make client management and use of limited resources more effective.

Finally, although HUD compares and reports data from communities across the country to create a nation-wide census on homelessness in reality counts are conducted differently across communities and results should never be compared due to wide disparity in methods. Even from year to year results are compared while the methods may differ – even in the same community.

Full data tables and copies of the sheltered and unsheltered survey forms are available for all areas of South Carolina at www.schomeless.org.

Section VI - Acknowledgements

It is not possible to list all of the agencies, volunteers, and people that gave their time and unselfish devotion to making the 2011 Count a success.

- Board and members from the Midlands Area Consortium for the Homeless – See Appendix
- Homeless Helping Homeless of Columbia – John Holmes, William Ford, William Sweat, Donald Thompson, Patricia Frierson, and Mathew Portlock.
- All of the wonderful volunteers
- 2011 MACH Count Coordinator & County Coordinators – see Appendix
- United Way of the Midlands
- S.C. Office of Research and Statistics
- Leadership and members of the South Carolina State Homeless Coalition
- Richland County Government HMIS
- The VISTAs and agencies that entered the count data.
- Most importantly – all of the people experiencing homelessness that participated and helped with the count.

Appendix A – MACH 2011 Board of Directors Listing

Mary Trivisano (President)
Catholic Charities

Susan Dean (Vice President)
Pilgrims Inn

Vertelle Jamison (Treasurer)
Samaritan House

Liz Norris (Secretary)
Mental Illness Recovery Center, Inc.

Donny Supplee (Past Chair)
United Way of Kershaw County

Barbara Rippy
Alston Wilkes Society

William Ford
Homeless Helping Homeless

Christy Slocum
The Women's Shelter

Lora Holiday
United Way of York County

Camelia Wall
Chance Jordan

Michele Murff
SC Dept. of Mental Health

Rebecca Frierson
HMIS

Larry Arney
Midlands Housing Alliance

Jennifer Moore
United Way of the Midlands

Marcy Coster-Schulz
Palmetto Health

Appendix B – 2011 Coordinator Listing

Mach 2011 Count Coordinator
Donny Supplee, United Way of Kershaw County

HMIS Coordinator
Rebecca Frierson, Richland County HMIS

Richland/Lexington Counties
Jennifer Moore, United Way of the Midlands

Orangeburg/Calhoun Counties
Jodi Bates, Compassion in Action

Kershaw County
Marie Sheheen, United Way of Kershaw County

Fairfield County
Barry Butler, Midlands Workforce Development Board
John Gibson, Veteran's Administration

Lancaster County
Mike Montgomery, Family Promise

Aiken
Lisa Tindal, Mental Health America of Aiken County

Rock Hill
Susan Dean, Pilgrims Inn
Lora Holladay, United Way of York County, SC

Allendale, Barnwell and Bamberg (Unless Donny had another name)
Peggy Kirkland, SC Region 3 Housing Authority

Newberry
Johnny Mack Scurry, Newberry Planning Commission & The New Enoree Baptist Association

Chester
John Williams, The Turning Point of Chester