

Rhode Island Emergency Shelter Information Project



Annual Report July 1, 2007 – June 30, 2008



Rhode Island Emergency Food and Shelter Board

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INTRODUCTION

In 1988, the Rhode Island Emergency Food and Shelter Board, with support from the United Way of Southeastern New England and the Rhode Island Department of Human Services, created a statewide Emergency Shelter Information Project to determine the size and profile of the population that utilized shelter services in Rhode Island. For the purposes of this project, a homeless person was defined as anyone who received emergency shelter, for whatever reason or whatever length of time.

Twenty-seven shelter providers have contributed to the formation of a database reflecting shelter usage in Rhode Island: nineteen emergency-/transitional shelters; six domestic violence shelters; and two voucher providers. Because of federal legislation protecting the confidentiality of domestic violence survivors, domestic violence shelters no longer contribute personal identifying information to electronic databases. Rhode Island's domestic violence shelters continue to provide aggregate data. As of June 30, 2008, the state's emergency shelters and domestic violence shelters had a total of approximately 1,250 beds.

This report summarizes information available from the client intake database during **Fiscal Year 2008**, which includes the period **July 1, 2007 through June 30, 2008**.

Information on shelter clients is based on information submitted to the state's Homeless Management Information System (HMIS). Because this system is still relatively new, it is not yet certain that complete information on all shelter clients has been entered into the system.

For this reason, the number given for total shelter nights is based on assuming a constant number of shelter nights per shelter client from 2002 to 2008. Other demographic and background information on clients is based on the 4,542 shelter clients whose information was entered into the HMIS.

As with previous Emergency Food and Shelter Board Reports, the figures in this report represent only those homeless persons who were able to receive shelter from one of the participating provider organizations. No data was collected on those who were turned away from the shelters due to the lack of beds or for other reasons. In addition, this report does not reflect the number of homeless individuals and families who remained on the street or sought shelter with friends or family.

Eric Hirsch, Professor of Sociology at Providence College, prepared this report. Without Don Larsen, Rhode Island HMIS Systems Administrator, and Bob Maurice, Assistant HMIS Administrator, this report would not have been possible. The Rhode Island Office of Housing and Community Development and the United Way of Rhode Island provided funding for this report.

RHODE ISLAND'S HOMELESSNESS CRISIS

- **6,437 people entered a Rhode Island shelter during 2007-2008. This is the second straight year of a modest decline in this total. However, this is still the third highest total since 1989.**
- **The number of families sheltered increased 17% to 953. This is the highest total of families ever sheltered. More children than ever before, 1,770, spent at least one night in a shelter.**
- **Native-Americans were eleven times, Blacks were seven times, and Hispanics three times more likely to be sheltered compared to non-Hispanic Whites.**
- **The two most important reasons for seeking shelter this year were having no income and housing costs.**
- **One third of clients in the shelter system experienced mental health and/or medical problems in the six months prior to entering the shelter.**
- **There are fewer long-term homeless clients in the shelter system. This year, 7% of clients have been homeless for two years or more, a decline of three percentage points compared to 2006-2007. Three-fifths of these Rhode Islanders have long-term disabilities and 78% have incomes below \$5,000 per year.**
- **Homelessness in Rhode Island can be effectively addressed through full implementation of the state's strategic plan to end homelessness.¹ This involves creation of subsidized family apartments and permanent supportive housing for single adults through programs like housing first programs and the Neighborhood Opportunities Program; creative use of rental subsidies and apartment based shelter programs such as First Step; homelessness prevention efforts; use of existing mainstream government programs such as income support and health insurance programs; and coordination of all helping agency efforts.**

¹ See the Appendix of this report for the plan.

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RHODE ISLAND'S HOMELESS SHELTERS

EMERGENCY/TRANSITIONAL

Amos House

Crossroads Rhode Island

East Bay CAP

Family Resources Community
Action

Interim House

Lucy's Hearth

MAP

McAuley House

McKinney Cooperative

MHCA/Oasis

New Hope Family

Rhode Island Family

South County CAP

Urban League of Rhode Island

Westbay CAP

Westerly Area Rest and Meals

Welcome House

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Blackstone Valley Advocacy Center

Domestic Violence Resource Center
of South County

Elizabeth Buffum Chace Center

Sojourner House

Women's Center of Rhode Island

Women's Resource Center of
Newport and Bristol Counties

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This year, for the second year in a row, the total number of clients served by the state's emergency shelter system has declined. 6,437 people used a shelter in the state from July 1, 2007 to June 30, 2008, a 5% decline compared to 2006-2007. The shelter system also provided 218,858 shelter nights. There were 953 families with 1,770 children in the shelters for 2007-2008. This is the greatest annual number of both families and children who have spent at least one night in the state's shelter system.

Having no income and high housing costs were again the two most important reasons for seeking shelter this year, cited by 30% and 19% respectively. Another 10% mentioned housing-related reasons such as legal eviction or landlord-tenant disputes.

The increasing significance of housing-related reasons for seeking shelter is not a surprise given the lack of affordable, safe housing in our state. A rent survey in 2007 found average rents for two-bedroom apartments in the state to be \$1,142 per month.² Assuming that renters can afford to pay 30% of their income for their housing, this means that an annual income of \$45,680 per year is required to afford the average apartment. This is \$17,600 more than the typical Rhode Island renter household has available.³

The lack of affordable housing has particularly affected families this year. 953 families with 1,770 children were forced to access the emergency shelter system this year.

There are important differences between short-term, chronic (multiple episode), and long-term homeless clients. The first time homeless are more likely to be employed, are more likely to enter with children, and are less likely to have mental health, drug, and alcohol problems. Those experiencing chronic and long-term homelessness are more likely to be disabled and to be veterans. They are also less likely to be employed and less likely to be Hispanic.

Certain groups continue to be disproportionately affected by homelessness. Native-Americans had a rate of shelter use this year of 44 per 1000, while Black people had a rate of 26 per 1000 and Hispanics had a rate of 12 per 1000 this compares to a rate of 4 per 1000 for non-Hispanic Whites and 1 per 1000 for Asian-Americans.

The 218,858 bed nights of shelter provided this year were the third most ever provided by the system, a 5% decline compared to 2006-2007. 198,123 (90.5%) of the nights were provided by emergency shelters and 20,735 (9.5%) by domestic violence shelters.

For the purposes of this year's report we have assumed that the number of nights used by each emergency shelter client has remained stable at 34 nights per client. Turnover, defined as the number

² Rhode Island Housing and Mortgage Finance Corporation Rent Survey, 2007

³ American Community Survey, 2007, U.S. Census Bureau

of clients using each bed during the year, is also assumed to stay the same at 11.

13% of shelter clients had gone without a permanent residence for more than a year, a four percentage point decline compared to 2006-2007. The average (mean) number of months that a client was without a permanent residence was 8.0 this year, a decline of three months.

Shelter clients remain very poor. One third of adult clients had no income last year and another 30% made less than \$5,000. This is a four percentage point increase in the percentage making under \$5,000 compared to 2006-2007.

Progress has continued this year in reducing the total number of clients using Rhode Island's shelter system. There are several possible reasons for this. 1) Rhode Island's plan to end homelessness is beginning to bear fruit. A variety of initiatives including Road Home, First Step, and Housing First Rhode Island have been designed to move homeless persons into permanent housing as quickly as possible. This is likely to be part of the reason for the reduction in the shelter population. 2) The housing bubble has burst. This has resulted in increasing vacancy rates as well as declining rents in some neighborhoods. The increased availability of affordable housing may have reduced the number of homeless persons.

Unfortunately, housing market conditions have also led to foreclosures which have led to evictions of

homeowners as well as tenants. These residents have begun to appear in the Rhode Island shelter system. The news on the number of homeless persons in the shelters may therefore not be as positive for 2008-2009. We will need to look at the data for the next few years to see if the downward trend in the sheltered homeless continues.

Regardless of the reasons for the decline, it is clear that additional work needs to be done. There were still over 6,400 people using the shelter system. And there are more long-term homeless persons than ever before. Key elements of the state's comprehensive plan including Housing First Rhode Island, First Step, the Neighborhood Opportunities Program, and prevention initiatives must be funded if progress toward ending homelessness is to continue.⁴ The plan provides for permanent supportive housing and attempts to keep those at risk of homelessness in their apartments and homes. It also mandates better use of existing mainstream government income support programs, such as SSI and FIP, as well as health insurance programs, such as Medicaid. It promotes effective coordination of assistance to each individual client by all homeless service agencies.

The thousands of homeless adults and children that are forced into the state's shelters each year deserve no less than complete implementation of a plan that holds the promise of ending or at least dramatically reducing homelessness in Rhode Island.

⁴ See Appendix

TRENDS IN SHELTER USE

Rhode Island's emergency shelter system served approximately 6,437 unduplicated clients for 218,858 nights between July 1, 2007 and June 30, 2008. This continues a trend of decline in the total number of homeless persons utilizing the state's shelter system that began last year. Figures 1 and 2 and Table 1 show that over the last eighteen years, the total number of clients served by the state's shelter system has fluctuated between 3,600 and 6,900 while the total number of shelter nights has fluctuated between 118,000 and 234,000 nights.

Figure 1. Number of Unduplicated Shelter Clients by Year

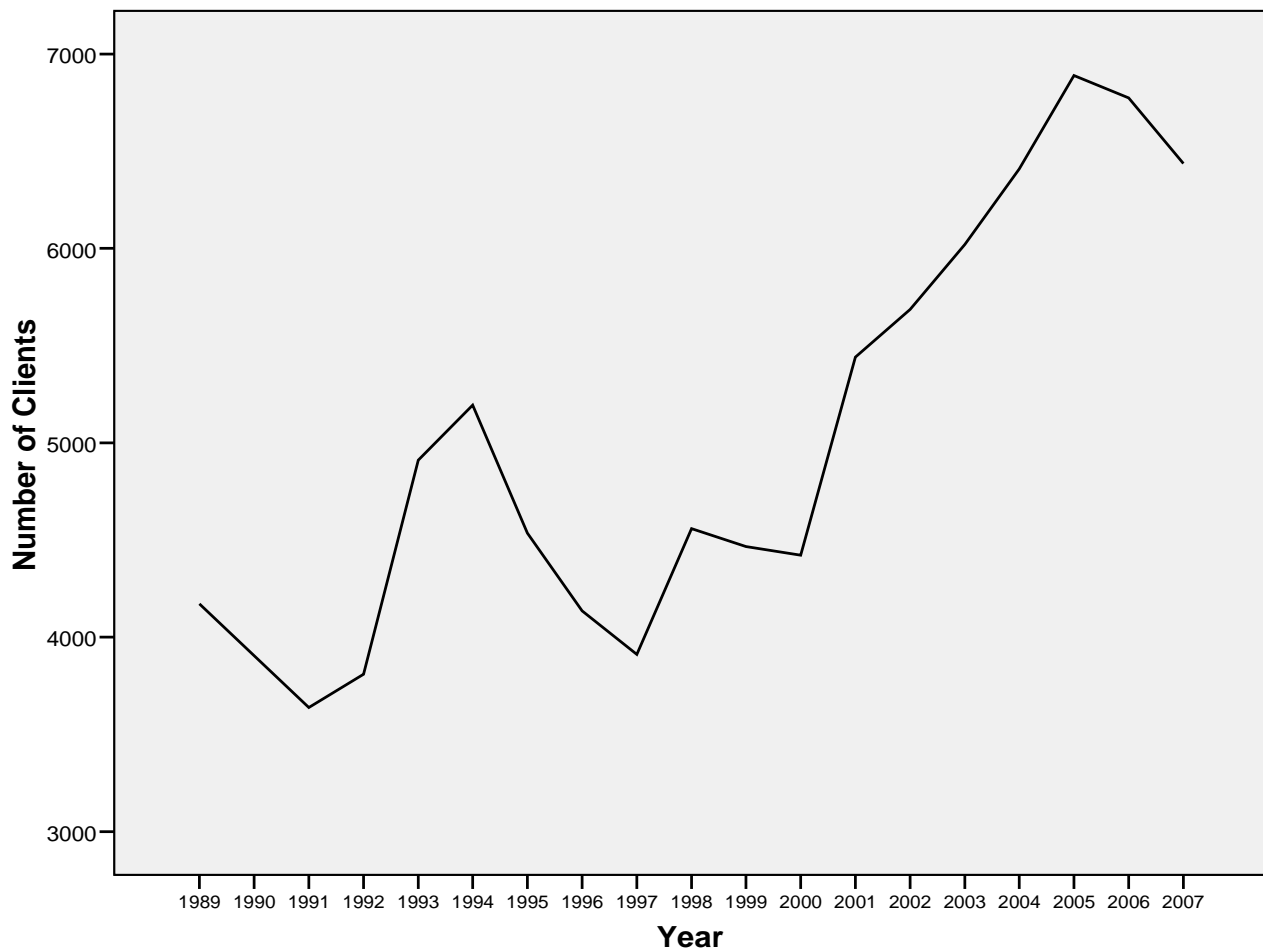


Figure 2. Total Shelter Nights by Year

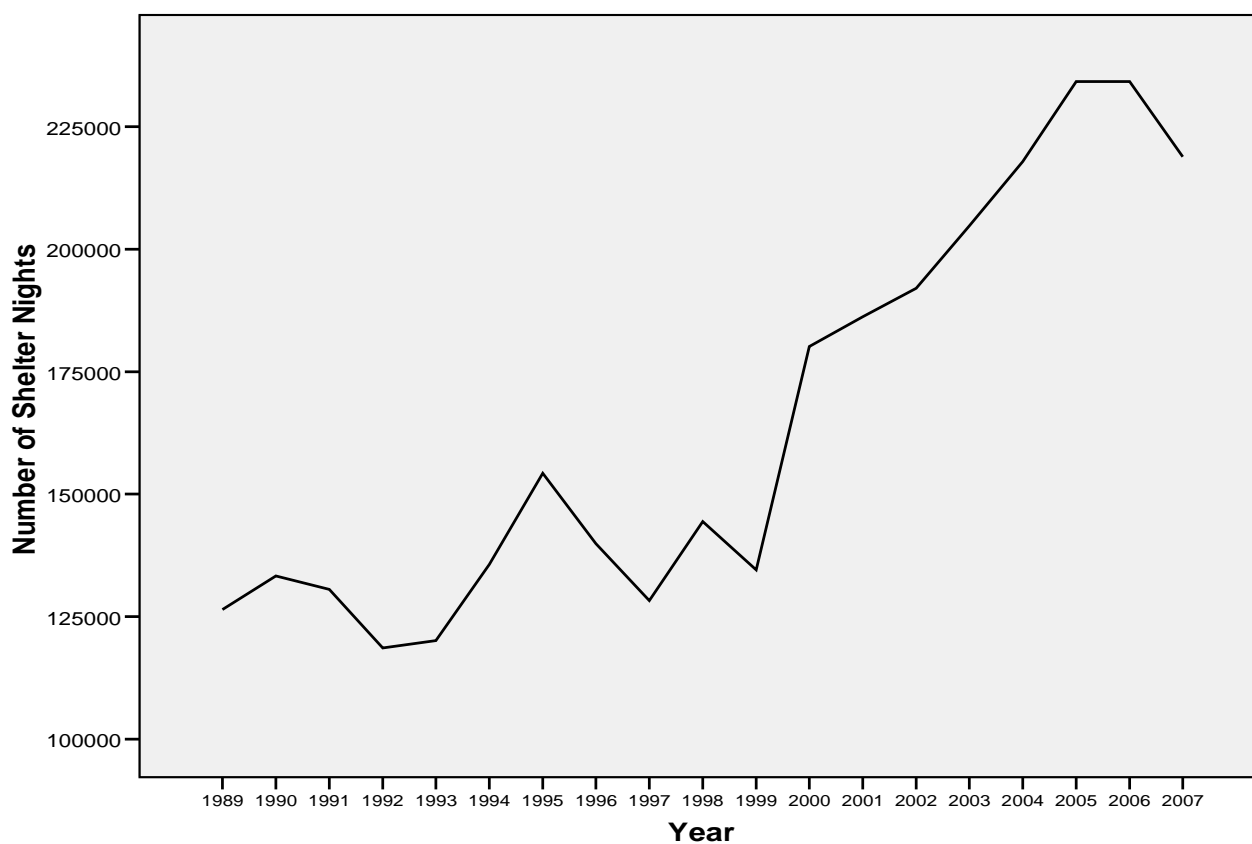


Table 1. Number of Clients and Shelter Nights- 1989-2008

	Number of Clients	Shelter Nights
1989-1990	4,172	126,454
1990-1991	3,905	133,319
1991-1992	3,638	130,517
1992-1993	3,809	118,564
1993-1994	4,910	120,060
1994-1995	5,193	135,630
1995-1996	4,535	154,237
1996-1997	4,135	139,894
1997-1998	3,911	128,241
1998-1999	4,558	144,412
1999-2000	4,466	134,540
2000-2001	4,421	180,135
2001-2002	5,440	186,187
2002-2003	5,686	192,034
2003-2004	6,020	204,770
2004-2005	6,408	217,871
2005-2006	6,889	234,226
2006-2007	6,773	230,282
2007-2008	6,437	218,858

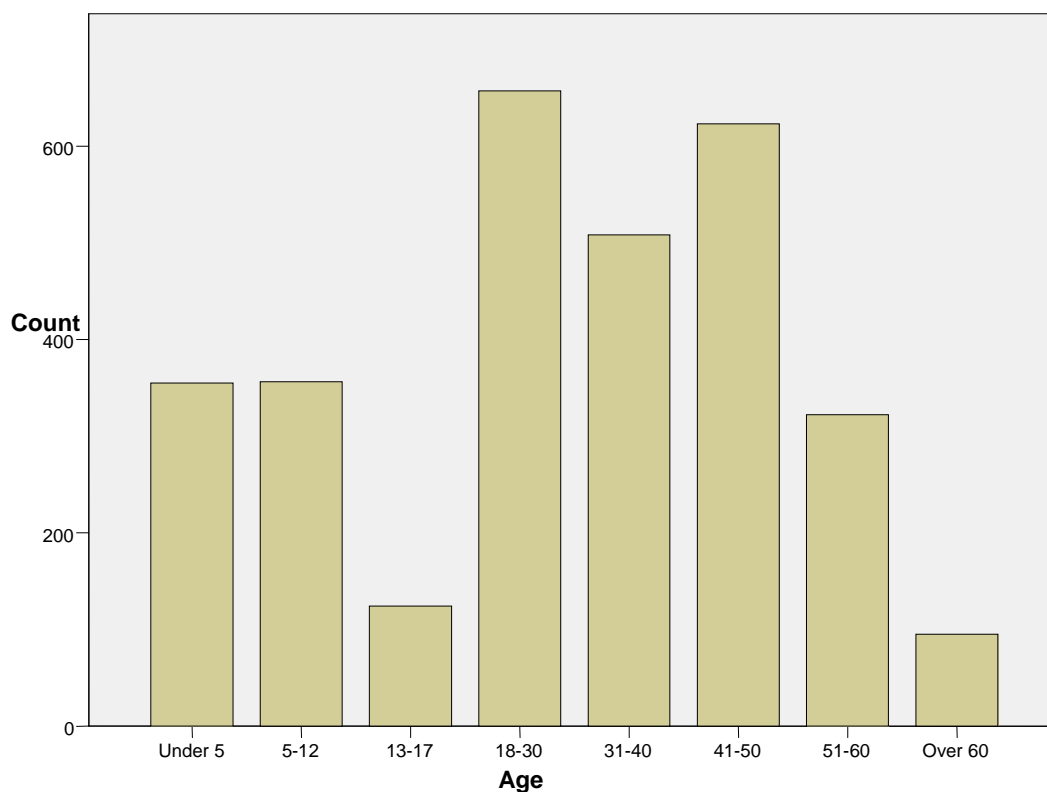
Rhode Island's shelters served 6,437 clients in 2007-2008. 5,752 of these clients utilized emergency shelters while 685 clients were admitted to domestic violence shelters. Over 218,000 nights of shelter were provided by Rhode Island's shelter system during the year. This estimate is based on the assumption of a constant number of shelter nights per client over the last several years. The average daily census was 218,858/365 or 600 occupied beds per average night. This is a decline of 31 beds per night over last year.

We are assuming for the purposes of this year's report that the average length of stay per client has remained unchanged at 34 nights. This is a fair assumption since the number of nights per client has fluctuated between 30 and 34 nights over the last six years. For 2007-2008, 198,123 (90.5%) of the nights were provided by emergency shelters and 20,735 (9.5%) by domestic violence shelters. In 2006-2007, 207,404 (90.1%) shelter nights were provided by emergency shelters and 22,878 (9.9%) by the domestic violence shelters. Turnover in the system as a whole is calculated by dividing total clients by average daily census or $6,437/600 = 10.7$. In other words, approximately eleven persons utilized each shelter bed during the last year. This is the same turnover figure as the previous year because we have assumed the same length of stay per client.

CLIENT CHARACTERISTICS

Age

Figure 3. Client Age 2007-2008



The percentage of children in our shelter system increased by four percentage points this year to 27% of total clients. The number of children per sheltered family increased to 2.1 per family for 2007-2008. There were an estimated 1,770 children under the age of eighteen in the shelter system for 2007-2008, the most ever reported. Table 2 shows the trend in the number of sheltered children over the last eleven years. 59% of clients were age 18 to 50, compared to 62% for 2006-2007. The percentage of clients over age 50 decreased from 15% to 14%. The mean age of clients in the shelter system declined from 32.3 to 30.2 years.

**Table 2. Number of Children in Shelter System
1997-2008**

Number of Children	
1997-1998	890
1998-1999	1,044
1999-2000	1,321
2000-2001	1,260
2001-2002	1,692
2002-2003	1,450
2003-2004	1,564
2004-2005	1,717
2005-2006	1,378
2006-2007	1,558
2007-2008	1,770

Gender

Considering only adults over the age of 17, an estimated 2,637 (56.5%) men were sheltered compared to 2030 (43.4%) women. This is a five percentage point lower number of adult males compared to last year's 61.2%. The gender distribution has always been more even for children. For 2007-2008, 52.7% of the children in the shelters were boys and 47.3% were girls. This means there were 933 boys and 837 girls in our shelter system last year.

Family Status

3,384 (72.5%) of sheltered adults entered shelters unaccompanied, including 2,288 males and 1,096 females. These numbers represent a decline of over 800 for males and a decline of 176 for females. 953 families utilized the state's family shelters. There were an average of 1.9 children per family. There were 1,283 (27.5%) adults who entered the shelters in families, 849 single mothers, 63 married couples, and 41 single fathers. Table 3 shows the trend in the number of families in the system over the last ten years.

**Table 3. Number of Families- 1997-2008
Number of Families**

1997-1998	471
1998-1999	578
1999-2000	644
2000-2001	588
2001-2002	689
2002-2003	731
2003-2004	794
2004-2005	809
2005-2006	882
2006-2007	790
2007-2008	953

Race

Table 4 shows that 49.2% of Rhode Island's shelter clients were non-Hispanic White in 2007-2008. This is the lowest percentage since shelter reports began. Blacks, Hispanics, and Native-Americans remain disproportionately over-represented in the shelters compared to their percentage in the state population as a whole, while Asian-Americans remain underrepresented. Under-representation of Asian-Americans may be due to their greater propensity to double-up with friends or family members. The U.S. Census Bureau reports that for Rhode Island in 2007, 4.4% of Asian households lived in units with over one person per room, compared to 3.8% of Black households, 5.2% of Hispanic households, and 0.5% of non-Hispanic White households.¹

Table 4. Race/Ethnic Status 2007-2008
Percentages

Non-Hispanic White	49.2
Hispanic	22.4
Black	20.8
Native-American	1.9
Asian-American	0.5
Multi-racial	1.6
Other	3.6
Total	6,437

Homelessness Rates

Knowing both the numbers of people who used the state's shelters during the year and the total population allows the computation of a rate that measures the chance that a Rhode Island resident will be forced to utilize a homeless shelter during the year. Using the figures reported above and 2007 American Community Survey data from the U.S. Census, the chance that a Rhode Island resident would enter a homeless shelter last year was 6,437/1,057,832 or 6.1 per 1,000. This rate is .2 lower than the previous year's rate. The table below uses year 2007 American Community Survey data to calculate homelessness rates by age, gender, and race/ethnic status.

¹ American Community Survey, 2007, U.S. Census Bureau

Table 5. Homeless Shelter Use 2007-2008
Rates per 1,000

Rhode Island Resident	6.1
Child under age 5	12.2
Adult Men	6.7
Adult Women	4.7
Whites	3.9
Blacks	26.1
Hispanics	12.2
Native-Americans	43.7
Asian-Americans	1.0

The figures clearly show that the burden of homelessness falls unequally on people of color and very young children. Native-Americans at 43.7/1,000 Blacks at 26.1/1,000, Hispanics at 12.2/1,000 and children under the age of 5 at 12.2/1,000 have disproportionately high rates of homelessness. Put another way, over four percent of Native-Americans, almost three percent of Black Rhode Islanders, over one percent of all Hispanics and young children in the state spent time in a homeless shelter last year. Native-Americans are eleven times more likely, Black Rhode Islanders seven times more likely, and Hispanics three times as likely to use a homeless shelter compared to Whites. Asian-Americans continue to be heavily underrepresented in the shelters, probably because of a higher rate of doubling-up with friends and/or family members.

Education

The estimated 4,667 adults who used the shelter system had low levels of educational attainment. 45.9% say their highest education level attained was high school graduate, 14.4% have a GED certificate, 2.4% had been to technical or trade school, while 15.2% had some college, 3.4% were college graduates and 1.5% had education beyond college. In contrast, 83% of adults statewide have graduated from high school and 30% have a bachelor's degree or better.²

² American Community Survey, 2007, U.S. Census Bureau

Veteran Status

8.5% of adults and 14.0% of adult males who used our shelters say they are U.S. military veterans. Both of the figures for veterans represent a three to four percentage point decrease compared to 2006-2007. This means there were 369 adult male and 47 adult female veterans in the shelter system last year. According to a national study, Rhode Island's veterans have the fifth highest housing cost burden among the fifty states.³ Table 6 shows some of the characteristics of our homeless veterans.

Table 6. Characteristics of Rhode Island's Homeless Veterans- 2007-2008
Percentages

Male	87.0
White	66.9
Black	26.3
Hispanic	4.6
Chronically Homeless	21.1
Long-term Disabled	45.3
Receiving Vet Services	23.0
Shelter Needed due to No Income	32.5
Shelter Needed due to Housing Costs	13.5
Medical Problems	39.0
Mental Health Problems	31.1
Incarceration	25.2
Alcohol Problems	21.7
Drug Problems	15.5
Income < \$5,000	56.3
SSI	23.9
Employed	11.0
Total	(164)

³ National Alliance to End Homelessness, *Vital Mission: Ending Homelessness Among Veterans*, 2007

Income

Table 7 details adult client income over the past ten years. 34% of adult clients say they have no income whatsoever. Another 31% make less than \$5,000 per year. According to the Census Bureau's American Community Survey, the median household income for Rhode Island households in 2007 was \$53,568.⁴

Table 7. Adult Client Family Income 1998-2008 (Percentages)

	'98-'99	'99-'00	'00-'01	'01-'02	'02-'03	'03-'04	'04-'05	'05-'06	'06-'07	'07-'08
None	42.3	41.2	37.8	42.6	41.7	15.7	21.6	49.7	37.7	33.6
Less than \$5,000	16.3	18.1	19.3	17.6	23.3	40.7	38.0	18.2	23.2	31.4
\$5,000-\$9,999	27.8	25.8	27.8	26.4	23.3	20.9	23.3	18.3	22.4	19.9
\$10,000-\$14,999	8.5	8.9	9.0	8.4	6.8	15.1	10.7	9.2	10.1	8.9
\$15,000-\$19,999	2.6	3.2	2.9	2.7	3.1	3.6	3.3	2.2	3.4	3.2
\$20,000+	2.5	2.7	3.1	2.3	1.7	4.0	3.0	2.3	3.1	2.9
Total	(2461)	(2370)	(2074)	(2929)	(2862)	(2024)	(2123)	(1448)	(3334)	(1923)

⁴ American Community Survey, 2007, U.S. Census Bureau

Sources of Income

Table 8 shows the sources of income of adult clients over the past six months before entering the shelter and at the time of shelter entry.

**Table 8. Adults- Sources of Income Past 6 Months and at Entry to Shelter
2007-2008 (Percentages)**

	Past 6 Months	At Shelter Entry
Job	17.9	10.0
General Public Assistance	1.0	1.9
Disability-TDI	1.6	1.9
Unemployment Compensation	1.0	1.0
VA Benefits	1.2	1.5
SSI-Social Security	18.6	19.5
FIP	13.7	12.8
Alimony/Child Support	1.3	1.3
Pension	.5	.5

The limited sources of income of shelter clients have not changed much from 2006-2007. Again, only two public assistance programs, SSI and FIP, provided income for a significant number of homeless adults. The percentage with support from SSI remained constant at around one-fifth of adults. The percentage with support from FIP remained constant at just over one-tenth of adults.

We also asked clients if they had lost income over the past year. 29% of adult clients said that they had, a three percentage point increase compared to 2006-2007. Of those who had lost income, 77% said they had lost employment income, 6% had lost income from FIP, 3% had lost SSI/SSDI and 3% had lost unemployment benefits. Considering only the 849 single mothers, just over one third (34.6%) lost income in the previous six months. Of those who lost income, 63.9% lost employment income while 21.8% lost income from the Family Independence Program.

Why Shelter is Needed

Over the years, several reasons have dominated when clients have been asked why they need shelter: lack of income, rent costs, domestic violence, family separation, and relocation from outside Rhode Island. The table below shows their answers to this question for the last eight years.

**Table 9. Why Shelter Is Needed 2000-2008
(Percentages)**

	'00-'01	'01-'02	'02-'03	'03-'04	'04-'05	'05-'06	'06-'07	'07-'08
No Income	21.0	20.3	23.0	30.7	31.3	32.7	32.1	29.6
Housing Costs	9.1	14.9	16.4	16.6	15.2	14.5	19.7	18.7
Other Reason	17.2	18.8	19.9	15.8	21.1	23.1	18.6	15.0
Domestic Violence	18.2	14.2	13.7	10.7	6.9	4.0	3.7	4.7
Relocation from Outside RI	9.6	10.0	7.4	6.3	8.1	8.6	8.4	9.1
Family Separation	9.0	7.4	6.9	9.2	8.0	8.4	7.7	9.9
Legal Eviction	10.3	8.2	6.5	5.0	4.4	4.8	4.9	7.1
Landlord/Tenant Dispute	5.4	4.9	4.4	4.4	3.6	2.7	3.6	3.0
Lack Utilities	.2	.1	.2	.3	.4	.1	.2	.2
Total	(3102)	(4313)	(4159)	(2590)	(2539)	(1569)	(3744)	(2418)

As in the previous four years, the most common reason for seeking shelter, mentioned by 30% of clients, is having no income. Housing costs, cited by 19% of clients, is again the next most common reason for seeking shelter. Housing costs are again also cited by a full one-third of clients when they are asked for the secondary reason for their seeking shelter. Other housing related reasons, such as evictions and landlord tenant disputes also continue to be mentioned by shelter clients. The percentage of clients affected by legal eviction has risen to the highest level since 2001-2002. Domestic violence, an important reason for seeking shelter in our system, is cited by only 5% of clients because we no longer have individual domestic violence shelter client data in our database. The percentage of clients seeking shelter primarily due to domestic violence would be 13% with those clients included. As in past years, a large number of clients, 15% this year, continue to mention "other" reasons for seeking shelter.

Past Place of Stay

Figure 4. Past Place of Stay 2007-2008

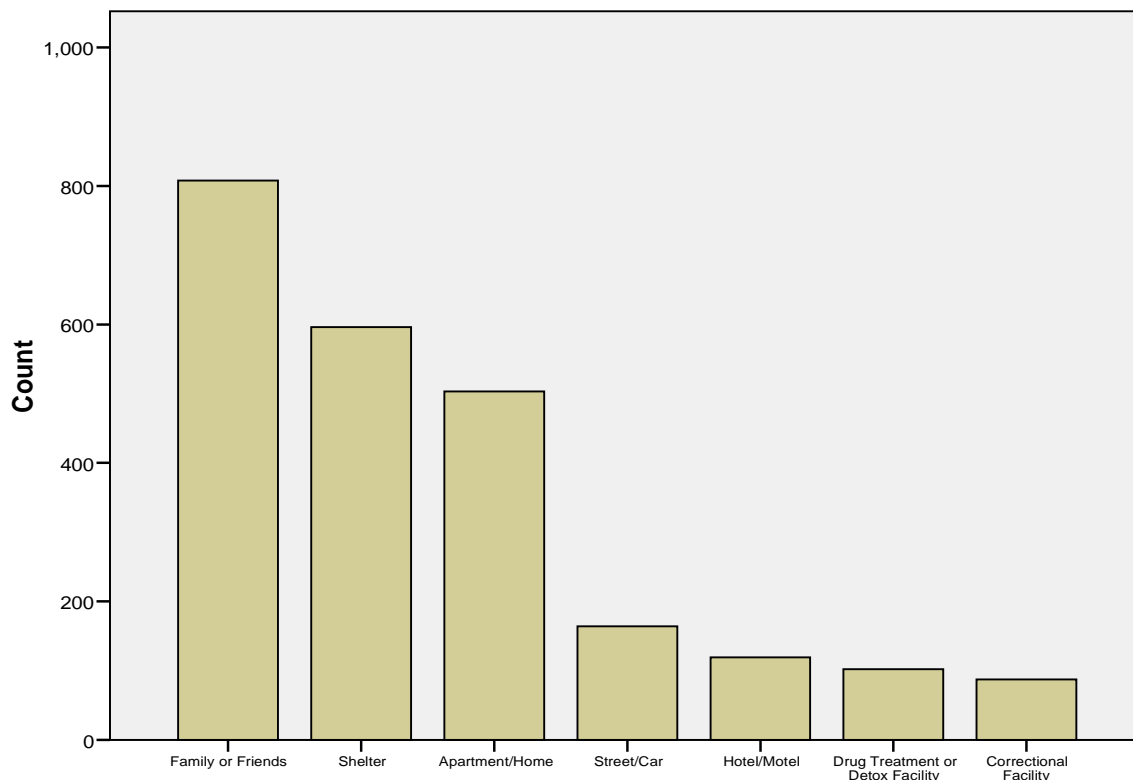


Figure 4 shows the most recent place the client stayed before coming to the shelter. For the first time, the highest percentage of people, 33%, came from Family or Friends. 25% came from another shelter, 21% from their own apartment or home, 7% from the street or a car, 5% from a hotel or motel, 4% from a drug treatment or detox setting, and 4% from a correctional facility. These figures represent an increase in the percentages coming from family, friends and their own homes and a decline in the percentage coming from shelter. As recently as 2005-2006, 38% of clients came into shelter from another shelter. These changes reflect the fact that our system sheltered more families and fewer single male adults. Families are more likely to enter shelters from doubled-up situations.

Months Since Last Permanent Residence

Clients were asked how long it had been since they had been in a “permanent” residence. It was noted last year that the state had been seeing many more long-term homeless

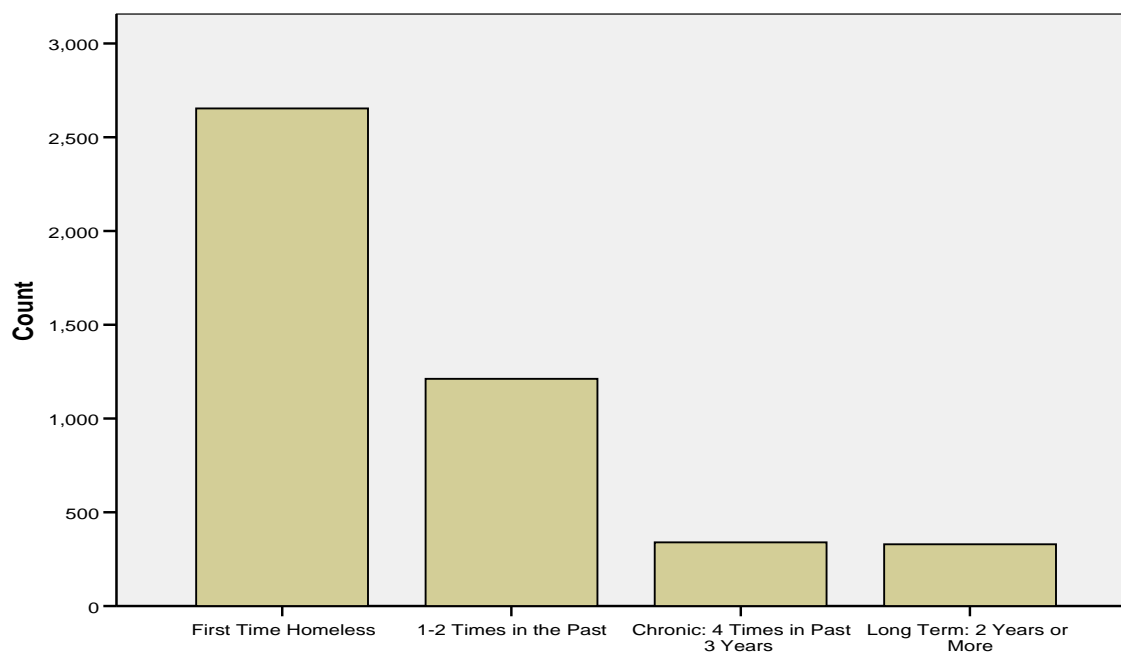
individuals and families. That trend has been reversed this year. Last year 39.5% of clients had been homeless for a month or less. For 2007-2008 that percentage has increased to over half of clients at 52.4%. The percentage of long-term homeless clients in the shelter system has declined for the first time 2002. 23.5% of the clients in the shelter system have been homeless for more than 6 months compared to 31% in 2006-2007. The mean months since last permanent residence also has decreased from 11.0 to 8.0, as low as it has been since 2003. The percentage of homeless clients who have been homeless for more than 3 years dropped by 2 percentage points from 6.2% to 4.3%.

**Table 10. Number of Months Since Last Permanent Residence 1999-2007
(Percentages)**

	'99-'00	'00-'01	'01-'02	'02-'03	'03-'04	'04-'05	'05-'06	'06-'07	'07-'08
< 1 Month	34.5	26.6	33.8	28.2	15.3	16.4	6.4	6.4	12.1
1 Month	25.7	29.0	31.4	24.9	24.7	25.3	36.6	33.1	40.3
2-6 Months	24.0	26.1	21.6	26.7	29.4	28.5	29.2	29.6	24.1
7-12 Months	8.2	10.8	7.2	12.0	14.5	14.0	12.7	14.3	11.0
13-24 Months	3.9	4.1	3.3	5.1	8.5	8.2	6.4	6.9	5.6
25-36 Months	1.3	1.8	1.3	1.8	3.2	2.8	2.7	3.5	2.6
>3 Years	2.4	1.7	1.3	1.3	4.2	4.7	5.9	6.2	4.3
Total	(3495)	(3134)	(4620)	(4144)	(2348)	(2383)	(1396)	(3458)	(2322)

Chronic and Long-Term Homelessness

Figure 5 shows the distribution of homeless clients by type of homelessness. The largest category is those who are homeless for the first time. 65.3% of clients fall into that category. 23.5% have been homeless one or two times before. 6.0% of clients are chronically homeless, that is, they have been homeless at least four times in the past three years. Finally, 5.2% of clients are long-term homeless; they have been homeless for two years or more at the time they entered the shelter. The differences as compared to 2006-2007 is that there has been a eight percentage point increase in the "First Time Homeless" category and one and one half to three percentage point declines in the other three categories. Table 11 reports on differences between clients in these four categories.

Figure 5. Type of Homelessness 2007-2008**Table 11. First Time vs. Chronic vs. Long-Term Homelessness 2007-2008**

	First Time Homeless	Once or Twice in the Past	Chronic: At Least 4 Times in Past 3 Years	2 Years+ Homeless
% Male	50.9	55.9	63.1	74.1
% Children	35.1	19.7	4.4	2.2
% Hispanic	27.1	18.4	8.3	9.2
% Long-term Disabled	25.0	36.8	61.9	60.0
% Mental Health Problems	26.2	40.5	54.1	54.4
% Medical Problems	26.5	33.9	47.1	44.9
% Alcohol Problems	10.4	24.6	29.7	34.3
% Drug Problems	10.0	22.7	27.4	27.0
% Employed	10.5	9.2	3.8	4.4
% Veterans	5.1	6.2	12.1	12.1
Total	(1752)	(632)	(162)	(139)

The table shows that the first time homeless and those who have been homeless once or twice in the past are similar in many ways. The first time homeless are more likely to be children, are more likely to be Hispanic and are less likely to be disabled or to have drug and alcohol problems. Those experiencing chronic and long-term homelessness are more likely to be single adult males, are less likely to be Hispanic, and are more likely to be disabled with drug, alcohol, and mental health problems. They are also more likely to be veterans and less likely to be employed.

Personal Problems

One of the questions on the intake survey asks clients if they have experienced any of a series of problems over the last six months. The table below shows client responses for the last seven years.

**Table 12. Personal Problems Experienced 2000-2007
(Percentages)**

	'01-'02	'02-'03	'03-'04	'04-'05	'05-'06	'06-'07	'07-'08
Sexual Abuse	2.4	2.8	3.5	4.0	3.1	2.7	2.9
Mental Health	14.5	17.5	30.9	31.2	42.8	39.3	33.5
Family Separation	20.5	19.3	33.6	31.7	40.1	33.2	33.7
Loss of Income	19.1	19.7	31.5	29.0	23.6	25.2	28.6
Medical Problems	16.9	19.9	32.7	34.1	42.2	38.4	30.9
Youth/Family Dispute	7.6	7.5	15.1	13.2	17.2	12.0	11.8
Drug Problems	11.6	13.3	22.6	18.5	22.6	21.3	15.6
Domestic Violence	16.8	16.4	17.3	14.3	13.4	10.3	11.5
Alcohol Problems	10.2	10.2	22.8	17.7	21.0	20.7	17.0
Incarceration	8.0	8.0	14.9	15.1	21.0	19.1	15.4
Total	(3134)	(4620)	(4528)	(2474)	(1570)	(3807)	(2374)

The problems experienced by the highest percentage of shelter clients are family separation, mental health and medical problems, mentioned by one third of all clients. Loss of income affects just under a third. Drug and alcohol problems, as well as incarceration affect 15% to 17% of clients. Domestic violence and youth/family disputes affect 12% of clients, while sexual abuse affects 3%.

It is important to consider the experience of women with regard to domestic violence, since it continues to be the most common reason for women to seek shelter in the state. 20.2% of the adult women in the state's homeless emergency shelters had experienced domestic violence in the six months prior to seeking shelter. This represents an underreporting of the severity of this problem among the state's sheltered women due to the fact that we no longer have detailed data on domestic violence shelter clients available for analysis.

Single Adults and Female Heads of Families

Table 13 reports on the significant differences between single adults and female heads of families. The sample size was not large enough to report on adult males entering in families.

Table 13. Family Status and Gender Differences- 2007-2008

	Single Males	Single Females	Female Heads
% from Family/Friends or Apartment/Home	35.6	43.0	82.0
% from Shelter/Street	44.4	40.5	10.7
% Hispanic	12.0	10.4	35.3
% 18-30 Years Old	19.9	23.3	58.8
Mental Health Problems	40.1	58.0	23.3
Incarceration	27.7	15.7	3.8
Alcohol Problems	28.2	24.2	3.3
Drug Problems	21.8	27.4	6.0
Shelter Needed due to No Income	43.3	32.8	13.9
Receive FIP	2.9	3.3	43.1
Receive SSI	19.7	29.1	10.7
Employed	9.7	8.3	13.2
Income < \$5,000	69.6	64.8	58.3
Total	(1078)	(515)	(371)

Families and single adults tend to enter our shelter system from different places; families come from doubled up situations or from their own apartments or homes, while single adults are more likely to come from other shelters or the street. Female-headed families are also much more likely to be Hispanic and to have household heads that are younger. Three-fifths of all female family heads entering the shelter system are under the age of 30 while less than a quarter of single adults are this young. Single adults are more likely to have experienced problems involving drugs, alcohol, and their mental health. Three-fifths of single women in our shelter system have mental health problems. Single men are the most likely to have been incarcerated in the last six months.

Single adults have lower incomes than female heads; two-thirds of single adults have incomes below \$5,000. They are more likely to cite no income as their reason for entering the shelter. Only about one quarter of single adults are on SSI presently. Nearly half of the female headed families entering the shelters receive support from the Family Independence Program. 13% of women entering in families are employed, compared to only 9% of single women and men.

CONCLUSIONS

This year, for the second year in a row, the Rhode Island emergency shelter system saw a decline in the number of people provided shelter during the year. An estimated 6,423 people sought shelter for 218,858 nights. 2,288 unaccompanied males, 1,096 unaccompanied females, and 953 families with 1,770 children were served. This is more children than have ever been in the state's shelter system. The decline for single adults may be due to a softening of the housing market as well as the implementation of effective government policies designed to end homelessness for chronically homeless single adults.

Given a housing system that bases access on ability to pay, homelessness continues to affect those most vulnerable to economic trends that result in low income. One third of adult clients have no regular source of income, and two-thirds have annual incomes of less than \$5,000 per year. Young children and racial and ethnic minorities continue to have disproportionately high rates of homelessness.

The average, available two-bedroom apartment rented for \$1,142 per month in Rhode Island in 2007. A family would have to earn \$45,700 per year to afford an apartment at that rent level, while the median household income of

Rhode Island renters was only \$28,049 that year.⁵

Government had begun to respond to the Rhode Island housing crisis, but the gap between our residents' housing needs and the affordable and safe housing available to them is still a large one. The state has 188,000 households making under \$50,000 per year that cannot afford private market rents, but only 36,000 low and moderate income housing units.⁶ The average wait for public and subsidized housing is five years or more. There are not nearly enough federal Section 8 vouchers available for low-income families.

These continuing housing problems can be solved. Homelessness can be addressed through the state's comprehensive plan, which provides for permanent supportive housing for single adults and subsidized rents and apartments for families.⁷ It lessens homelessness through eviction prevention efforts, and emphasizes increasing use of under-utilized mainstream public programs and coordination of homeless services to serve each homeless client. Ending this ever-increasing crisis of homelessness in Rhode Island will require a coordinated effort of government and non-profit agencies.

⁵ American Community Survey, 2007, U.S. Census Bureau; RI Housing Rent Survey, 2007

⁶ American Community Survey, 2007, U.S. Census Bureau; RI Housing, Low and Moderate Income Housing by Community, 2007

⁷ See Appendix

Appendix- Rhode Island's Plan to End Homelessness

After five years of all-time highs in both the number of people in our shelter system and the number of nights they spend there, the last two years have seen a modest decline in those numbers, particularly for unaccompanied adults. This may be the result of the implementation of important parts of the state's plan to end chronic homelessness. This plan was developed by the Office of Homelessness and Emergency Assistance, a subcommittee of the Rhode Island Housing Resources Commission. The Rhode Island Coalition for the Homeless has also developed a complementary plan to end homelessness in the state. These plans have a number of components.

Housing Production

The state's Family Housing and Permanent Supportive Housing Funds, part of the Neighborhood Opportunities Program, have produced nearly 1,000 units of housing over the last six years. Half of the units are subsidized family apartments affordable to households making as little as \$14,000 a year. The other half has been permanent supportive housing, affordable to single adults making as little as \$8,000 a year. Over the last two years, the state and the United Way of Rhode Island have also pioneered Housing First Rhode Island, a permanent supportive housing program based on a "housing first" model that has provided housing and supportive services to 50 chronically homeless persons. Supportive housing programs such as these provide permanent housing to single adults and whatever associated services they need to stay in that housing, including furniture, food, GED classes, drug/alcohol or mental health counseling. This approach saves money since homeless people often utilize services in other public institutions such as mental hospitals, medical hospitals, or prison. A recent preliminary evaluation of the program has shown that even after accounting for program costs, it saves nearly \$9,000 per client per year in institutional costs, particularly due to a dramatic decline in hospital stays.¹

Because of declining federal housing expenditures, Rhode Island also needs to build more low and moderate income housing. Between 1991 and 2002 only 5,669 low and moderate income housing units were built statewide. Given high rents, often over \$1,100 for a two-bedroom apartment, and low household incomes, just over \$28,000 for the typical rental household in the state, the need for such housing is in the tens of thousands of units.² To address these needs, the state proposed a \$50 million housing bond. Voters overwhelmingly passed this bond in November 2006.

Homeless Prevention

It is important to prevent families and individuals from entering our homeless shelters. Due to the shortage of safe, affordable housing, shelters are becoming the only housing alternative for too many people. Shelters were designed for emergencies only; they are not adequate as permanent housing. If families or single adults have permanent housing and are in danger of losing that housing for any reason, it is cost effective to provide case

¹ Eric Hirsch and Irene Glasser, "Rhode Island's Housing First Program Evaluation," United Way of Rhode Island, November 2008

² U.S. Census, American Community Survey 2007

management and minimal subsidies needed to keep them in that housing. The state adopted an apartment-based shelter program called the First Step program to divert homeless adults from congregate shelters and to provide a better, more consistent path to permanent housing.

Another approach to prevention is to provide state-based rental subsidies. Like permanent supportive housing, rental subsidies can create savings by preventing use of more costly services such as mental health facilities, emergency rooms, or prisons. Rhode Island Housing is creating more rental subsidies through its innovative Road Home program.

Finally, mediation with the landlord or use of emergency funds can prevent eviction and a move to an emergency shelter. This approach is being pioneered in the state by the Community Mediation Center of Rhode Island as well as Rhode Island Legal Services.

Use of Mainstream Resources

One problem homeless people face is that they are often not participating in government programs for which they are eligible. Since 1994, there have never been more than one-fifth of homeless single men and one-third of homeless single women on Supplemental Security Income (SSI). Participation by female heads of families in the Family Independence Program (FIP) is still less than half at 43%. A study by the author on individuals who have spent some nights unsheltered found that more than half had no health insurance of any kind.³ Other resources from mental health, substance abuse, corrections, and child welfare agencies may also be under-utilized by homeless individuals and families. One important solution for this problem is a program called “presumptive eligibility” which gets homeless single adults onto SSI quickly. This is another innovative program underway in the state.

Coordination of Services

It is important that all government agencies be dedicated to ending homelessness. For example, state agencies or private agencies receiving state funding should be encouraged to avoid discharging individuals or families into homelessness.

There must also be targeted outreach efforts to long-term and chronic homeless persons. Those experiencing long-term homelessness can be particularly difficult to assist since they have found a way to survive on the streets. They may also have substance abuse and mental health issues that present barriers to becoming permanently housed. The efforts of such organizations as Access Rhode Island, that do outreach to those experiencing long-term homelessness, are therefore an important part of the plan to end homelessness.

There are a large number of homeless service agencies in the state. The plan to end homelessness attempts to ensure that all agency efforts are coordinated and effective. It will require a concerted, cooperative effort from state agencies, non-profits, and the public to effectively implement this plan to end or at least to dramatically reduce homelessness in Rhode Island. We have the plan. We need only the will to make it work.

³ Eric Hirsch “A View from the Street,” Rhode Island Foundation, January 2004

City/Town of Last Residence for Shelter Clients- 2007-2008

	Number	Percent
Barrington	16	.2
Bristol	16	.2
Burrillville	18	.3
Central Falls	151	2.3
Charlestown	40	.6
Coventry	58	.9
Cranston	264	4.1
Cumberland	32	.5
East Greenwich	3	.1
East Providence	100	1.5
Exeter	16	.2
Foster	8	.1
Glocester	5	.1
Hopkinton	11	.2
Jamestown	5	.1
Johnston	71	1.1
Lincoln	21	.3
Little Compton	5	.1
Middletown	68	1.1
Narragansett	34	.5
Newport	346	5.4
New Shoreham	2	.1
North Kingstown	85	1.3
North Providence	77	1.2
North Smithfield	24	.4
Pawtucket	441	6.9
Portsmouth	45	.7
Providence	2109	32.7
Richmond	21	.3
Scituate	2	.1
Smithfield	20	.3
South Kingstown	108	1.7
Tiverton	11	.2
Warren	24	.4
Warwick	248	3.8
Westerly	188	2.9
West Greenwich	3	.1
West Warwick	153	2.4
Woonsocket	370	5.7
Rest of New England	425	6.6
Rest of U.S.	666	10.3
Outside U.S.	127	2.0
Total	6,437	100.0