

The 1994 Count of Homeless Persons



THE CITY OF
CALGARY
COMMUNITY STRATEGIES

Homeless Persons, 1994

The City of Calgary's Social Services department coordinated a survey of various shelter and non-shelter service providers located mainly in the downtown core to determine the number of homeless persons who may have used such services on the night of 1994 May 19.

Social service shelters, women's shelters, hospitals, police services, emergency services (e.g., Alberta Family and Social Services), outreach and community services (of the City of Calgary's Social Services) participated in the count. Although the types of service providers who participated did not change from the count done on 1992 May 20, the number who participated in the count increased to include the Mustard Seed Ministry and the Labour Centre. Additionally, the number of hospitals who participated in the count expanded to include the Rockyview, Foothills, and Peter Lougheed hospitals.

Representatives were asked to record the number of persons with whom they came into contact that night who either slept in that facility overnight or who were seen sleeping "on the street". To the extent possible, participants were asked to note the individual's gender, age and race as well as the number of homeless family units served that night. The term "family" was defined to be a "couple", "couple with children", or "an adult with children".

A total of 461 homeless persons were counted on the night of 1994 May 19. It should be noted that no homeless persons were counted at the hospitals located outside the downtown core. The majority (59.9%) of the individuals counted were between the ages of 25-44, with the overall percentage of males (74.8%) far exceeding the percentage of females (16.3%). Children represented 5.9% of the individuals counted, while seniors comprised 2.4%.

Age and Gender Distribution of Homeless Persons, 1994

Age	Females	Males	Unknown	Total
0-4	4	12	0	16
5-14	4	7	0	11
15-24	24	68	0	92
25-44	37	239	0	276
45-64	4	1	0	5
65+	0	11	0	11
Unknown	2	7	41	50
Total	75	345	41	461

With regard to the observed race, 71.8% of the individuals were Caucasian followed by 21.9% who were Aboriginal. A total of 25 families were counted on that night and housed at the women's shelters, Booth Centre, Drop-In Centre, and Sunshine Centre.

Observed Race of Homeless Persons, 1994

Race	Number	Percentage
Aboriginal	101	21.9%
Asian	8	1.7%
Black	12	2.6%
Caucasian	331	71.8%
Unknown	9	2.0%
Total	461	100.0%

There was a slight increase in the total number of homeless persons counted in 1994 compared to the 447 counted in 1992. As with the 1992 count, the present count does not reflect the actual number of homeless persons in Calgary. An undetermined number of homeless persons would not have been counted through this process. For example, persons who stayed with a friend that night or persons who slept in a place where they could not have been seen would not have been counted. Since the number of homeless families were not included in the previous count, this number provides a benchmark with which subsequent counts can be compared.

The weather conditions on the night of 1994 May 19 were about the same as they were two years ago. The temperature was above 0 degrees Celsius in 1994 unlike the unseasonably cold temperatures experienced in 1992; however, it was raining heavily on 1994 May 19 and had been raining heavily since the previous day. The poor weather conditions may have contributed to the low number of individuals who were counted on the streets and to some agencies not reaching their expected capacities. For example, some of the homeless persons may have found shelter from the rain on the previous night thereby reducing their visibility "on the street". While most services did not reach capacity on May 19 despite the poor weather conditions, Avenue 15 had to turn away two young males due to the lack of available space.

In addition to the poor weather conditions, there may be other uncontrolled variables. For example, three of the agencies reported that they do not serve either children and/or families and one agency noted the need for space tends to be reduced the night before a long weekend.

Finally, one agency reported that on the night of the count, the emergency workers were on an investigation from 1:30 a.m. to 3:30 a.m. making their service less accessible due to calls received during that time being answered by an answering service.