

POINT-IN-TIME COUNT

Toolkit

*Enumerating Youth as
Part of the 2016 HPS
Coordinated Count*

Using this RESOURCE

The Youth Homelessness PiT Count Module provides practical strategies for communities to ensure accurate and respectful enumeration of youth, in the 2016 HPS Coordinated Count. All communities, regardless of their size or available resources, can implement at least some of the strategies contained below.

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Executive SUMMARY

The experience of homelessness for youth differs from that of adults. Consequently, youth are historically undercounted in PiT Counts. For example, youth are often less visible due to the transient nature of their homelessness. Many youth live temporarily with friends or acquaintances - known as couchsurfing - making them largely invisible to the community. Youth are more likely to show fear or mistrust of the homelessness sector; they may actively avoid contact with child welfare, the juvenile justice system, or health and mental health services. Consequently, the standard PiT Count approach may underrepresent the issue of youth homelessness in a given community.

While there is a growing focus on the issue of youth homelessness, an effective response requires accurate data. We must understand the number of youth that are effected by homelessness. We also must know the extent to which certain groups are overrepresented, such as youth who are part of the LGBTQ2 community, pregnant and/or associated with child welfare.

This module will help communities to ensure that youth are represented in the Coordinated Count led by the Homelessness Partnering Strategy. It covers strategies such as: broadening the scope of the PiT Count to include hidden homelessness, holding youth-specific magnet events, liaising with youth service providers and/or schools, engaging LGBTQ2 youth and targeted survey design. All communities, small or large, will have the necessary resources and experience to employ even a few of the suggested strategies.

YOUTH HOMELESSNESS: *Measuring our Progress*

In Canada, and elsewhere, there is a growing recognition that youth homelessness is a distinct and pressing issue; an issue that every community faces. Over the last few years, we have seen an increased and deliberate effort to implement tailored strategies specifically towards addressing youth homelessness. As noted in the State of Homelessness 2014, “if the causes and conditions of youth homelessness are distinct, so must be the solutions” [ref].

Our collective progress is undeniable. Notably, in 2015 the Government of Alberta launched its [provincial plan](#) – a first of its kind – to prevent and reduce youth homelessness. Similarly, at a local level, communities such as Kingston, ON and Kamloops, BC - as part of the [Mobilizing Local Capacity program](#) - have developed and are implementing plans to end youth homelessness.

We have recognized that youth homelessness, in any amount, is unacceptable. But, in an effort to end youth homelessness, we must first understand the true extent of the issue. Then, we must measure our progress. With each strategy, initiative and plan to end youth homelessness we must ask ourselves: are we effectively working towards our shared goal?

Here, lies the importance of Point-in-Time (PiT) Counts. The [2016 HPS Coordinated Count](#) provides a significant opportunity to build on the efforts made towards ending youth homelessness. Communities that are conducting a PiT Count for the first time will understand the extent to which youth homelessness is an issue. Communities that have previously conducted a PiT Count will measure their progress against their efforts. Collectively, we will paint a clearer picture of youth homelessness in Canada.

However, the benefits of the [2016 HPS Coordinated Count](#), relative to youth homelessness, can only be realised if participating communities implement targeted strategies to engage and enumerate youth. If the causes, conditions and solutions for youth homelessness are distinct, so too are the strategies required to measure it.

This module – as part of the COH PiT Count Toolkit – will help communities to practically and accurately enumerate youth during the [2016 HPS Coordinated Count](#). In late 2015, the COH will launch enhanced guidance, for those communities that are considering a dedicated Youth PiT Count following the 2016 HPS Coordinated Count.

THE CHALLENGE

Few would argue about the importance of enumerating youth homelessness. However, in practice, it is difficult to effectively and accurately enumerate youth through standard PiT Count methods. A PiT Count provides a snapshot of homelessness – it inherently undercounts the extent of homelessness in a community – but, there is growing recognition that youth are particularly likely to be undercounted. The reasons are numerous but can include the following:

SLEEPING LOCATION

Many youth are temporarily or episodically homeless. That is, they experience one or more periods of homelessness for a short-period of time (Gaetz et al., 2013). Often, during these periods of homelessness, youth stay with friends or acquaintances, known commonly as couch surfing. Problematically, couch surfing – a type of hidden homelessness – is difficult, if not impossible, to fully capture through a PiT Count.

VISIBILITY

Youth can often go to great lengths to avoid being identified as homeless. Some youth, particularly those connected to the child protection or foster care systems, develop strategies to stay hidden from the public, services and law enforcement. Consequently, it can be difficult to find, let alone survey youth experiencing homelessness.

SERVICE USE

The sheltered count is a key facet of most PiT Counts. It is a total count of the number of individuals that stay in emergency shelters and transitional housing on the night of the count. While a sheltered count provides some indication of the extent of youth homelessness, many youth are unwilling - due to fear or mistrust - or unable - due to a shortage of beds - to stay in shelters. This may be particularly, and problematically, true amongst the estimated 25-40% of youth that identify as LGBTQ. As such, youth disconnected from the shelter and avoiding the street, are unlikely to be enumerated.

The 2016 HPS COORDINATED COUNT

Undeniably, there are barriers to accurately enumerating youth through Point-in-Time Counts. However, despite these challenges, there are a number of strategies that can be easily implemented within the [2016 HPS Coordinated Count](#) and ultimately, will improve the accuracy of your count. The benefits of focusing on youth will far outweigh any additional resources required to plan and implement your count. The benefits include:

- » A Clearer Picture of Youth Homelessness
- » Informed Service Delivery
- » Sector-Wide Collaboration
- » Improved Public Awareness
- » An Opportunity to Measure Progress

Strategies to Improve the Enumeration of Youth

The following strategies will help communities to practically and accurately enumerate youth during the [2016 HPS Coordinated Count](#).

DEFINING YOUTH HOMELESSNESS

As noted, the conditions by which youth become and experience homelessness differ from adults. While the [HPS Guide to PiT Counts in Canada](#) stipulates the types of homelessness that will be enumerated as part of the [HPS Coordinated Count](#), it is still useful to consider a youth-specific definition of homelessness. Doing so will allow you to make adjustments to your PiT Count methodology, to ensure that youth are accurately enumerated in your PiT Count.

Canadian Definition of Youth Homelessness¹

“Youth homelessness” refers to the situation and experience of young people between the ages of 13 and 24 who are living independently of parents and/or care givers, but have no stable or consistent residence and currently lack the means and ability to acquire it. Young people who become homelessness are typically in the process of transitioning towards adulthood (cognitively, socially, emotionally) and may not have acquired the personal, social and life skills, experiences, education and resources to become fully independent and sustain themselves over the long term. Youth homelessness becomes a major social problem when society fails to provide young people and their families with necessary and adequate supports to enable them to transition to adulthood and independence in a safe and planned way. Few young people choose to be homeless, and the experience is generally negative, unpleasant, stressful and distressing.

¹ The Canadian Definition of Youth Homelessness - led by the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness - is forthcoming, expected for release in 2015

PROVISIONALLY ACCOMMODATED “COUCH SURFING”

The PiT Count methodology was designed specifically to measure unsheltered and sheltered homelessness - most commonly, individuals that are ‘rough sleeping’ or residing in emergency shelters. Other types of homelessness – such as couch surfing – are not well captured through a PiT Count. In fact, it is impossible to measure the extent of hidden homelessness in a community through a PiT Count. It is thereby difficult to measure the extent of youth homelessness in a community. Youth, who are more likely to couch surf, are routinely missed through PiT Counts. If youth homelessness is a priority in your community, consider using a broader definition of homelessness for your PiT Count, one that includes individuals living temporarily with others (see the [Canadian Definition of Homelessness](#), item 3.2).

Worth noting: You must be clear with stakeholders that the PiT Count cannot provide an estimate of hidden homelessness in your community. However, through the PiT Count Survey, it can provide valuable data on the experience of youth homelessness; Data that may otherwise be missed if youth who are couch surfing are ineligible to participate.

Resource: For more information on hidden homelessness refer to [The COH Toolkit: Adding to the Count](#).

DIFFERENCES WITHIN THE YOUTH HOMELESS POPULATION

Individuals that experience homelessness are not a homogenous group; this similarly applies to youth homelessness. As the Canadian Definition of Youth Homelessness (forthcoming) notes: males, Aboriginal youth, black youth, newcomers and youth that identify as LGBTQ2 tend to be overrepresented among the homeless population. A key objective of your PIT Count should be to measure the extent to which certain demographics are overrepresented among youth experiencing homelessness in your community; this information is crucial for effective service planning and delivery.

Worth noting: Work with services that have experience with marginalized groups; they will provide you with information on where to locate youth and strategies to encourage participation in youth magnet events.

FIRST STEPS: PLANNING & LEADERSHIP

A commitment to engage and enumerate youth should occur at the outset of your count. As such, it is imperative that youth-focused stakeholders play key roles in the planning and implementation of the count.

THE PIT COUNT

Consider hiring a PiT Count Coordinator who has knowledge of or experience with youth homelessness. Due to the overrepresentation of both Aboriginal Peoples and LGBTQ2 youth experiencing homelessness, it may be beneficial to select a PiT Count Coordinator that has expertise in one or more of these issues.

Alternative: You may decide to hire an Assistant PiT Count Coordinator and/or a dedicated Youth Count Coordinator who can champion strategies to engage youth throughout the count.

THE PIT COUNT COMMITTEE

The PiT Count Committee – regardless of its size – should have at least one expert on youth homelessness, preferably more. Youth shelter providers, outreach workers and youth with lived experience will add tremendous knowledge to the planning and implementation.

Alternative: If there are a number of youth-focused stakeholders that you would like to formally include in the planning process, consider forming a PiT Count Sub-Committee; one that oversees the youth portion of the count.

FIRST STEPS: MOBILIZING THE COMMUNITY

A successful PiT Count relies on partnership with key stakeholders, particularly youth that have experience with homelessness. While some stakeholders will assume key roles within the PiT Count leadership, other stakeholders will become partners to learn from, consult and improve awareness about the count.

YOUTH ENGAGEMENT

Youth will be a major asset in the planning and implementation of your PiT Count. Consider developing an Advisory Board comprised of youth with various backgrounds and experiences. Youth can provide input on the locations of other youth, give feedback on the survey, brainstorm ideas for volunteer training and raise awareness among other youth about the count.

STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

Seek to consult stakeholders beyond the ‘usual suspects.’ While youth shelter providers will undoubtedly provide valuable information, others such as school officials, parents, drop-in centres, LGBTQ2 services, corrections, faith-based organisations and youth-focused researchers can provide additional support and resources.

Resource: For more information, refer to the National Alliance to End Homelessness’ brief on [Developing Key Partnerships](#).

POLICE INVOLVEMENT

Your local Police Service will be an important ally during your PiT Count, particularly in regards to the whereabouts of youth. Carefully consider how best to partner with the police. In some communities, it may be appropriate for plainclothes police officers to participate as volunteers. In other communities, it may be advisable to limit police participation on the day of the count. Work with your local police force to ensure that youth are not “cleared away” from known or frequented locations ahead of the count.

MEDIA ENGAGEMENT

Positive partnerships with the media encourage better awareness of homelessness and greater support for PiT Counts. Carefully consider how your PiT Count might improve awareness and combat common stereotypes about homeless youth. As part of your communication strategy, you may decide to issue a press release or write a blog post specifically about your efforts to enumerate youth homelessness. Further, you can use social media to advertise your count, particularly to encourage attendance at youth-focused magnet events (see Methodology: Where to Count).

Worth noting: As with all survey participants, be sure that the confidentiality of youth is carefully protected. You should obtain explicit consent from youth that are acting in an advisory capacity, prior to their participation in any media activities.

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Worth noting: Work with services that have experience with marginalized groups; they will provide you with information on where to locate youth and strategies to encourage participation in youth magnet events.

METHODOLOGY: WHERE TO COUNT

The success of your PiT Count will rely on your ability to locate the individuals that are experiencing homelessness in your community. With youth, this task can be especially difficult. Youth, particularly those involved with child protection or foster care, often employ strategies to stay hidden from sector workers and law enforcement. For full guidelines on the PiT Count methodology refer to the [Canadian Observatory on Homelessness Toolkit: Who to Count](#) and the [HPS Guide to Point-in-Time Counts in Canada](#).

STREET SURVEY

Communities participating in the 2016 HPS Coordinated Count are required to enumerate unsheltered homelessness, via a street survey. As you [map your count](#), consult with youth outreach workers and services to identify ‘hot spots’ where youth congregate. Your Youth Advisory Board will be an important source of information on the whereabouts of youth. On the night of the count, consider pairing youth with a team of outreach workers, to visit any encampments or sleeping locations outside your core map zones. This will be particularly relevant in more rural communities.

SHELTERED SURVEY

The HPS Guide to PiT Counts in Canada encourages PiT Count Coordinators to build close partnerships with emergency shelter providers. As you [build an inventory](#) of shelter beds and transitional housing units in your community, be sure to include youth facilities. At minimum, youth-housing providers will [indicate the number of youth](#) that stayed at the facility on the night of the count. Ideally, shelters and transitional housing providers will work with you to administer the PiT Count Survey to youth. Provide shelters and housing providers with youth-targeted posters, flyers and pamphlets to disseminate to youth. Helping youth to understand the purpose of the PiT Count may encourage greater participation.

Building buy-in: Consider holding an information session for front-line workers. Explain the purpose and the objectives of the PiT Count. Demonstrate your understanding of youth homelessness and reiterate the importance of their cooperation. Allow staff to ask questions. Front-line workers can relay information about the PIT Count to youth, respond to any concerns and encourage participation.

YOUTH SERVICES

As noted in the previous section, Methodology: Who to Count, you will need to consider whether to include hidden homelessness – including couch surfing – in your PiT Count. Communities that are pursuing survey data on couch surfing should strongly consider service-based enumeration. Service-based counts occur on the night of the count, or the day following, at non-residential locations. For example: health clinics, libraries, food banks, youth employment programs, drop-in centres, LGBTQ2 services and Aboriginal youth organizations. Here, you may encounter youth that may otherwise be missed through the street and sheltered surveys.

Worth noting: Surveying youth in non-residential services will provide you with additional data on the experience of youth homelessness, a valuable asset. However, conducting a service-based count will not provide you with the number of youth experiencing hidden homelessness. Ensure that this message is clear throughout the planning, implementation and reporting stages of your count.

MAGNET EVENTS

Service-based enumeration requires additional planning and resources; this approach may not be feasible in every community. You may consider holding a youth magnet event instead of, or in addition to, a service-based count. Magnet events occur at youth-serving agencies, often during the night of the count or a few hours prior. The magnet events feature food, activities, giveaways, resources and information about youth services. At the magnet event, all youth are given the option to participate in the PiT Count survey; though their participation in the magnet event is not contingent on such. Ideally, the magnet event will attract youth that are not otherwise connected to a service on the night of the count. To achieve this, the magnet event needs to be widely publicized through social media, youth networks and word of mouth.

Resource: In 2013, a number of US Cities piloted youth magnet events. For information on these experiences, refer to [Youth Count! Process Study](#).

PUBLIC SYSTEMS

Communities participating in the [2016 HPS Coordinated Count](#) are not required to include [public systems](#) - such as hospitals, jails and detention centers – in their count. However, some communities, particularly those that have previously conducted counts, may have pre-existing relationships with public systems; thereby, making it easy to implement a public systems count. If you are considering a public systems count, consider partnering with youth facilities such as youth detox centres and juvenile detention. If this is not feasible in 2016, consider building relationships now, for future counts.

Worth noting: In the US, some communities have [successfully partnered](#) with School Boards to support and implement youth PiT Counts. Only in exceptional cases will communities have the time and resources to build partnerships with schools for the [2016 HPS Coordinated Count](#). Communities that are interested in working with schools in future counts should begin to build relationships as soon as possible. As a first-step, encourage school staff and leadership to volunteer for the count. Familiarity with PiT Count methods may improve future cooperation.

METHODOLOGY: WHAT TO ASK

A PiT Count serves two functions: first, to measure the extent of homelessness. Second, to gather valuable data on those experiencing it. The [PiT Count survey](#) provides a unique opportunity to gather data on the demographics and service needs of individuals. As we know, the conditions by which youth become homeless are distinct; a well-drafted PiT Count survey will provide insight into how youth become homeless in your community and to what extent, if any, certain youth are overrepresented among those experiencing homelessness.

Communities participating in the [2016 HPS Coordinated Count](#) are required to use the [HPS 10 Core Survey Questions](#). Additionally, communities are encouraged to add survey questions based on local needs and priorities. The COH recommends that participating communities consider including the COH questions that are of particular relevance to youth homelessness. These questions are highlighted below.

CONSULTING STAKEHOLDERS

You will need to consult with stakeholders - those on your PiT Count Committee, Youth Sub-Committee or your broader network of PiT Count supporters – to determine the types of information your community needs on youth homelessness. As a community, consider what you know about youth homelessness and more importantly, what you don't. It will be easier to secure community support if the information needs of service delivery organizations and other youth-specific stakeholders are considered.

THE COH SURVEY QUESTIONS

In an effort to build [consistency among communities](#), the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness – in partnership with the National Homeless Count Research Advisory Team – has developed and piloted a set of additional [survey questions](#) for communities to use. Communities that are prioritising youth homelessness should strongly consider the COH questions pertaining to: gender (#3B), sexual identity (#C1), educational attainment (#C2), foster care (#C3) and barriers to housing (#C5). The COH encourages communities to share other youth-specific questions.

ASKING TOUGH QUESTIONS

Some PiT Count Stakeholders, including members of your PiT Count Committee, may be rightfully concerned about asking questions that are deemed too personal or sensitive; the confidentiality and safety of survey participants, particularly youth, should be the utmost priority. As such, all PiT Count questions should be asked discretely and respectfully, by experienced staff or trained volunteers. We cannot shy away from important, relevant questions such as those about gender, sexuality and health. These issues have a demonstrable impact on youth homelessness; a lack of data will ultimately hinder our response. That said, as you draft your PiT Count survey, ask yourself with each question: do we require this information to address youth homelessness in our community?

Resource: For more information on the rationale for each COH question, refer to the [COH List of PiT Count Survey Questions](#).

YOUTH-SPECIFIC SURVEY

You may decide to administer a separate survey to youth (provided that the 10 HPS Core Questions remain). Keep in mind that this may present additional administrative challenges for your volunteers; thereby increasing the likelihood of errors.

HOMELESSNESS VS HOUSING

Those experiencing homelessness represent a large and diverse group; not everyone will identify as homeless. With widespread misconceptions and harmful stereotypes about people experiencing homelessness, it is understandable that youth may be quick to disassociate themselves from this label. As you draft survey questions, avoid the term ‘homeless’ where possible. Please note: you cannot change the wording of the HPS Core Questions.

Similarly, when you advertise the PiT Count and youth magnet events, you may avoid the word ‘homeless’ in favour of more neutral terminology such as ‘housing survey’ or ‘a survey for youth who have left home.’

TESTING THE SURVEY

Test your PiT Count Survey with a range of individuals with lived experience, including youth. Start with your Youth Advisory Board. Have them provide feedback on the survey and identify questions where volunteers and/or survey participants may be confused or misinterpret the question.

PROVIDING RATIONALE

Youth may want to know the purpose of the PiT Count Survey. Is it confidential? How will the data be used? How will it help youth? Some youth may go a step further and ask the rationale for specific questions, particularly those questions more sensitive in nature. Be sure that survey administrators - whether volunteers or service staff - are prepared to explain the purpose of each question.

IMPLEMENTATION: ETHICS AND CONSENT

As with any research, you must carefully consider the process in which you obtain consent, especially from youth under the age of 18. It is unlikely that youth experiencing homelessness will be in a position to provide parental consent; often a requirement when conducting research with minors. The COH thereby recommends the guidelines put forward by York University's Human Participants Review Committee (HPRC) as stated in [Guidelines for Conducting Research with People who are Homeless](#). While these guidelines provide a useful foundation, the PiT Count Coordinator and Committee should adapt these protocols to their local and provincial/territorial context.

CONSENT

As per the HPRC guidelines, youth aged 16 and older can participate in a PiT Count survey without parental consent. However, survey administrators must clearly explain the purpose of the PiT Count survey, how the information will be used and that all responses will remain confidential. Youth should know that they can terminate their participation at anytime, even after they have given consent.

DUTY TO REPORT

Youth under the age of 16 should not be eligible to participate in the PiT Count Survey. However, as the HPRC guidelines note, there is an obligation to report to child protection when a child is found, without protection, in a potentially harmful situation. With youth that are experiencing homelessness, this can be particularly problematic as many youth are fleeing or deliberately evading child protection services. The COH recommends the following:

- » If a volunteer encounters a homeless youth - under the age of 16 - at an unsheltered location or non-youth service, a youth outreach worker should be dispatched immediately. The youth outreach worker should decide whether to report based on their professional judgement and guidelines put forth by their employer.
- » If a volunteer encounters a homeless youth – under the age of 16 – at shelter or youth-service, a member of the service staff should be notified.

Resource: For more information, refer to the [Guidelines for Conducting Research with People who are Homeless](#).

SERVICES

Develop a card, pamphlet or flyer with list of youth-services and supports in your community. Volunteers should be instructed to distribute this resource upon encountering youth under the age of 24. Be sure to include resources specifically for Aboriginal and LGBTQ2 youth and newcomers. It is advisable to include the email address of the PiT Count Coordinator or another designated official, so that youth can follow up with questions or feedback, if desired.

HONORARIA

Providing honoraria, such as gift cards, granola bars and travel passes, for survey participants is encouraged. However, honoraria should be mentioned after youth have given their consent as to not coerce them into participation. As the Calgary Homeless foundation notes:

It is problematic to explicitly use foods vouchers for recruitment in the process with such a vulnerable population. Given their economic situation and health, doing otherwise can become a form of coercion (Calgary Homeless Foundation, 2009).

Worth noting: Consider compensating your Youth Advisors for their time with an additional honorarium or gift of thanks.

IMPLEMENTATION: CONDUCTING THE COUNT

No PiT Count is perfect. A number of unexpected circumstances will arise throughout planning, implementation and data analysis. However, where the safety of volunteers and survey participants is concerned, you should take every precaution to prepare for unanticipated events; a perfect count is a safe count. Sufficient volunteer training, contingency planning and emergency preparedness are not exclusive to enumerating youth; however, additional considerations should be made for youth due to their increased vulnerability.

SURVEY ADMINISTRATION

Ideally, you will partner with service providers to administer surveys in youth shelters on the night of the count. In some instances, shelter staff may be resistant to welcoming volunteers into the facility. In other instances, shelters may have too few resources to administer the PiT Count survey, thereby preferring additional help from volunteers. Ultimately, youth service providers will know their clients best. Work with them to develop an approach that will encourage participation but above all, protect the safety of youth.

Worth noting: While shelter staff will have experience working with youth, do not assume that they will be knowledgeable about survey delivery. Provide training to shelter staff that are administering PiT Count surveys to youth.

YOUTH PARTICIPATION

Youth experiencing homelessness will be an invaluable source of knowledge and expertise. However, you must carefully consider how you will involve youth during the PiT Count. In some communities, youth with lived experience have acted as survey-administrators. It is thought that youth may be more willing to participate with a peer than an adult volunteer. Conversely, some communities have restricted this type of participation out of concern for the confidentiality of other youth participants. Regardless, ensure that you set reasonable expectations with your Youth Advisors about their participation in the count.

Resource: For more information, refer to the [Youth Count! Process Study](#).

VOLUNTEER TRAINING

It is unlikely that you will have the time or resources to deliver youth-specific training to those volunteers assigned to youth shelters and services. Further, there is no way to anticipate whom volunteers will encounter during the street survey. As such, all volunteers must be prepared to survey youth experiencing homelessness. Ensure that your Team Leaders and volunteers are familiar with your protocols on obtaining consent and their ‘duty to report’.

Worth noting: Consider inviting a member of your Youth Advisory Board to present at the volunteer training session. This could be an opportunity for volunteers to better understand youth homelessness.

SAFETY

As previously recommended, ensure that you have clear safety guidelines in place for the count. You should have experienced outreach workers on hand to respond to emergencies. Ideally, this will include youth outreach workers that are familiar with the local youth population. Similarly, your local police force should be aware of the count and prepared to act quickly. Provide training to Team Leaders and volunteers on the types of situations they might encounter, including those specific to youth, and how best to respond.

AFTER THE COUNT

Once the PiT Count is complete, there are a number of opportunities to leverage the results to improve the local response to youth homelessness. One of the greatest benefits is the opportunity to start conversations - supported by accurate and timely data – about youth homelessness. As communities analyze and report their data, they should carefully consider the messages they want to convey.

DE-DUPLICATION

Traditionally, PiT Counts are held over a short time frame, usually between four and six hours. During this time, the shelter count and the street count happen simultaneously. This reduces the likelihood that individuals are counted and surveyed more than once. Unfortunately, magnet events and service-based counts – the methods most effective in capturing youth – increase the likelihood that a youth could participate in the PiT Count survey more than once. While volunteers should ask all survey participants if they have previously participated in the survey a youth may, understandably, be inclined to participate more than once, to receive additional honoraria.

One approach to de-duplicating the data is to create unique identifiers for each participant. For example, the first two letters of a participant's first and last name and their year of birth. During the data analysis stage, duplicate entries can be removed.

Resource: For more information on unique identifiers or other de-duplication methods, refer to the [Youth Count! Process Study](#)

REPORTING ON HIDDEN HOMELESSNESS

PiT Counts provide two types of information. First, the number of people experiencing homelessness; that is, “the count.” Second, data on demographics and the experience of homelessness. If you choose to include couch surfing in your PiT Count, carefully consider how to analyze the data. As noted, a PiT Count will not provide an accurate estimate of hidden homelessness; therefore, you should not include youth that are couch surfing in your total “count” of people experiencing homelessness in your community. Instead, report the number of youth who are couch surfing, separate from the number of youth who are unsheltered or sheltered; emphasize that the number of couch surfing youth is a significant underestimation.

Include a youth section in your PiT Count report. Here, you can aggregate all of the surveys completed by youth, ages 16-24 – regardless of their sleeping location. This section should discuss demographics and trends but it should not claim that the number of completed surveys is the number of youth experiencing homelessness (as per the explanation above).

SHARING THE RESULTS

The data collected through the PiT Count should be shared with those that it affects most: individuals experiencing homelessness. Consider providing copies of the PiT Count report or a summary of the youth data to youth-services in your community. Further, be sure to share the results of the count with your Youth Advisory Board. Encourage them to ask questions and share the results with others. Do not forget to circulate the report to other stakeholders, for instance: police, schools and health-services, faith-based organizations.

IMPROVING AWARENESS

Leverage the relationships you built with media at the outset of the count. Use the PiT Count results to start, or continue conversations about youth homelessness. Consider this an opportunity to dispel myths about homeless youth and encourage greater local support for plans to end youth homelessness.

PLANNING THE NEXT COUNT

Seek feedback from youth, youth-services and volunteer evaluations to identify the successes and challenges of the count. The PiT Count Coordinator should make recommendations to the PIT Count Committee on strategies to improve youth engagement and enumeration in future years.