

Research Brief

Homelessness in the North Carolina Resident Offender Population

May 2006

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Most states are developing strategies to end homelessness among their citizens. A recurrent theme in many state and local plans is an acknowledgement that increased focus on the housing needs of ex-offenders is required if community goals are to be met.¹ Citing national data that show more than half of homeless individuals have been discharged from publicly funded systems, the *North Carolina 10 Year Plan to End Homelessness* challenges public agencies – including the Department of Correction (DOC) – to review and improve policies that may impact the number of people whose release may result in homelessness.²

Over the past several years, the DOC has increased emphasis on transition and pre-release planning services that are designed to improve employment opportunities for offenders after they leave prison and to link inmates with resources in the community where they will return. In addition to strengthening services that may help to reduce the risk of homelessness after release from DOC custody, a study was designed to provide a description of homelessness within the offender population.

The Office of Research and Planning selected a representative sample of the offender population who met the definition of being “discharged from a public funded system.” This eliminated the majority of probationers except for those assigned to the residential community corrections treatment facility for substance abusers.

The sample was stratified by gender and age to represent the large groupings of offenders: adult and youth males and females. To capture the flow of offenders, categories were defined as groups of inmates within six months of release (projected homelessness), and probationers being released after completing residential substance abuse treatment (either a 28-day or a 90-day program). Inmate

¹ See plans for the cities of Atlanta, Memphis, Indianapolis, New York City, and Chicago, for example.

² The Interagency Council for Coordinating Homeless Programs, 2005

BRIEF HIGHLIGHTS

- Approximately 7% of inmates surveyed at entry to North Carolina’s prisons met the Federal definition of homeless.
- Approximately 69% of inmates homeless prior to entry reported that they lived on the street.
- Domestic discord/violence was reported by 40% of inmates homeless prior to entry.
- More than one-third of all entering inmates surveyed reported they had been homeless at some time in their lives.
- Approximately 20% of inmates surveyed within 6 months of release reported that they did not know where they would live after release.
- Nearly one-quarter (23%) of inmates surveyed within 6 months of release reported a residence that met the Federal definition of homelessness.
- Potentially homeless inmates (meeting the Federal definition) most frequently reported a need for clothing assistance, vocational rehabilitation, and housing upon release.
- Less than 5% of offenders surveyed entering DART-Cherry met the Federal definition of homeless.
- Approximately 10% of community offenders surveyed at DART-Cherry reported a place of residence upon release that met the Federal definition of homelessness.
- Potentially homeless community offenders most frequently reported a need for clothing assistance, Medicaid/Medicare, drug or alcohol support groups, and employment services.
- Many of the potentially homeless inmates and community offenders reported a full-time, part-time, or short-term job as a realistic prospect upon release.

groups who had been admitted to prison within the last 30 days (recent self-reports of homelessness) were chosen to provide a picture of homelessness in the admission population. This design allowed us to project homelessness in the population leaving correctional facilities and contrast it to homelessness in incoming inmates. This brief presents descriptive results from this anonymous survey conducted at 19 facilities between August 2003 and August 2004.³

Statistics are presented for each of the three populations in separate sections within this brief: inmates entering prison, inmates exiting prison and community offenders assigned to substance abuse treatment at the DART-Cherry facility.

DEFINITION OF HOMELESSNESS

The Federal government defines a homeless individual as one who lacks a "...fixed, regular and adequate nighttime residence" or one whose primary nighttime residence is a temporary shelter or residence or a place not "...designed for, or ordinarily used as, a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings."³ This definition includes individuals with an impending release from an institution and who have neither immediate housing nor the resources to obtain housing.⁴

ESTIMATED HOMELESSNESS IN INMATES ENTERING PRISON

There were 464 surveys from seven (7) correctional processing facilities. Approximately 7% of inmates entering North Carolina's prisons reported answers that met the Federal definition of homeless when asked where they lived before coming to prison.

More than two-thirds (69%) of inmates homeless prior to incarceration reported that they lived on the streets; 22% reported that they lived in a vehicle, tent, or camper; 19% reported that they lived in an emergency shelter. Table 1 shows the responses of homeless inmates by gender.

Categories were used to describe the period of time inmates were homeless. The most frequently reported amount of time homeless prior to incarceration was between 6 and 12 months. Similar lengths of stay were reported regardless of the last place these inmates resided.

Inmates that were homeless were more likely to report unemployment prior to incarceration than were non-

homeless inmates (74% and 44%, respectively).⁵ There was no reliable difference in reported hourly wages for working inmates who were homeless compared to working inmates who were not homeless.

Table 1: Places of residence for homeless inmates entering prison*

	Vehicle Tent	Emergency Shelter	Street	Inmates
Male	6	6	16	25
% inmates	24.0%	24.0%	64.0%	
Female	1	0	6	7
% inmates	14.3%	0.0%	85.7%	
Total	7	6	22	32
% inmates	21.9%	18.8%	68.8%	

*multiple responses allowed

PATTERNS OF HOMELESSNESS IN INMATES ENTERING PRISON

The Amherst H. Wilder Foundation's statewide surveys of homeless adults, children, and youth in Minnesota suggests that the majority of homeless adults have at least two substantial barriers to overcome in order to maintain a stable housing situation. A majority of inmates that were homeless prior to entering NC DOC custody reported multiple experiences associated with either transitional or chronic homelessness.⁶

For example, the majority of homeless inmates reported that they had been unable to pay bills (53%) while half reported an episode of drug or alcohol abuse. Slightly less than one-third (30%) reported a major health problem or physical disability. Domestic disruptions (divorce or separation, domestic violence, or loss of parental rights) were reported by 40% of homeless inmates; female inmates were more likely than male inmates to report domestic disruptions (86% and 26%, respectively).⁷

Homeless female inmates were more likely than homeless male inmates to report multiple experiences that are associated with either transitional or chronic homeless-

³ 42USC11302

⁴ *Annual Report to the Governor*. The Interagency Council for Coordinating Homeless Programs, 2005.

⁵ (X=10.2750, p=0.001, n=443)

⁶ For definitions of transitional and chronic homelessness refer to The National Alliance to End Homelessness (<http://www.endhomelessness.org/>), accessed January 2006.

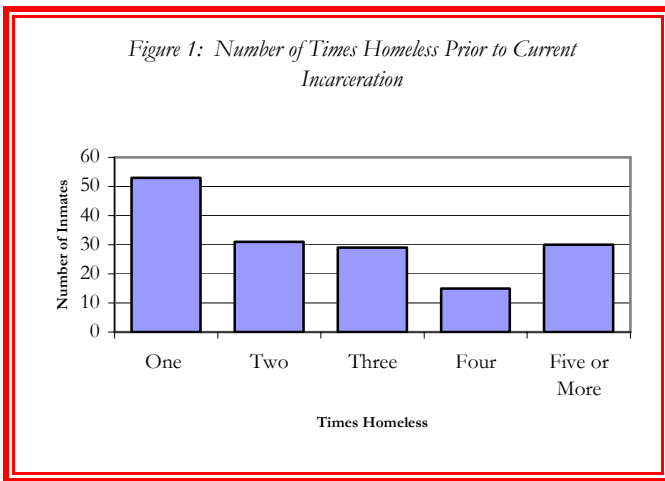
⁷ (X=7.9503, p<0.01, n=30)

ness in the year prior to incarceration (100% and 52%, respectively).⁸

EPISODES OF HOMELESSNESS IN INMATES ENTERING PRISON

Regardless of whether the inmate was homeless immediately prior to incarceration, slightly more than one-third (36%) of entering inmates reported that they had been homeless at some time in their lives. Compared to entering male inmates, entering female inmates were more likely to report that they had been homeless.⁹ Nearly 33% of male inmates and 43% of female inmates were homeless at some time in their lives. Figure 1 shows the number of times these inmates were homeless prior to the most recent period of incarceration.

When asked to report on the causes of their homelessness, most inmates (54%) pointed to only one factor. Approximately 20% identified two factors, 10% identified three factors. Only 7% identified more than three factors. A little under 10% identified no specific factors.



Factors cited most frequently as contributing to homeless episodes were drug or alcohol abuse (45%), unemployment or lack of money (41%), criminal convictions (23%), evictions (18%) and separation or divorce (15%). There was no difference between the factors reported by male inmates compared to female inmates.

PROJECTED HOMELESSNESS IN INMATES EXITING PRISON

It is widely believed that an increased focus on discharge planning is a key element in the effort to end homelessness for persons exiting public institutions. For inmates leaving the custody of NC DOC, transition planning begins prior to release.

⁸ (X=5.3760, p=0.02, n=32)
⁹ (X=4.0146, p=0.05, n=464)

The Division of Prisons (DOP) attempts to locate temporary housing for exiting inmates who report no permanent residence. Even for inmates that report an intended place of residence there is no way to ensure that the inmates' future housing is permanent. In order to make an estimation of potential future homelessness, we asked inmates within 6 months of release where they would live after exiting DOC custody. We examined the responses of 500 inmates from 13 correctional facilities all of whom were within 6 months of release.

Approximately 23% of responding inmates provided responses that indicated a potential for future homelessness. Most of these inmates (88%) reported that they did not know where they would live after release from prison. Approximately 4% reported that they would live in a vehicle, camper, or tent; 3% reported that they would go to an emergency shelter; slightly more than 5% reported that they would live on the streets. The differences in reports between male and female inmates were not statistically significant. Table 2 shows responses by gender.

Inmates were asked with whom they plan to live after release from prison. Among inmates exiting prison into potential homelessness, fewer than half expect to live with family after release from prison (47%) while many expect that they will live alone after release (51%).¹⁰

Female inmates were more likely than were male inmates to report a return to a familial living arrangement (81% and 36%, respectively) and more likely to report that they would live with their children (50% and 5%, respectively).¹¹ Male inmates were more likely than female inmates to report that they expected to live alone after release (60% and 23%, respectively).¹²

Table 2: Expected Residence of Potentially Homeless Inmates after Leaving Prison

	Vehicle / Tent	Emergency Shelter	Street	Don't Know	Inmates
Male	3	2	6	72	83
% inmates	3.6%	2.4%	7.2%	86.7%	
Female	1	1	0	26	28
% inmates	3.6%	3.6%	0.0%	92.9%	
Total	4	3	6	98	111
% inmates	3.6%	2.7%	5.4%	88.3%	

¹⁰ Multiple responses were accepted for this question. Most inmates reported only one response.

¹¹ (X=15.6065, p<0.001, n=106); (X=29.5091, p<0.001, n=106)

¹² (X=10.7045, p≤0.001, n=106)

PROJECTED SERVICE NEEDS FOR POTENTIALLY HOMELESS INMATES EXITING PRISON

With respect to anticipated needs upon release from DOC custody, inmates that reported a residence plan consistent with future homelessness also reported a demand for a variety of services. A great majority (87%) reported need for more than one service. Approximately 60% reported a need for between two and five different services.

Clothing assistance was most frequently reported by these inmates followed by vocational rehabilitation, public housing, Medicaid/Medicare and food pantry or free meals. Female inmates were more likely than male inmates to report a need for certain services. These services included family counseling, drug/alcohol treatment, 12-step programs, Medicare/Medicaid, and public/Section 8 Housing.¹³ Table 3 shows the percentage of male and female inmates that responded 'yes' to each service needed at release.

Table 3: Services needed at release for potentially homeless inmates by gender

Service	Male (77)	Female (28)	Total Percent 'Yes'
Legal Aid	26%	25%	26%
Veteran's Assistance	14%	4%	11%
Sex. Assault Counseling	3%	7%	4%
Employment Training	35%	36%	35%
Mental Health Care	16%	25%	18%
Food Pantry/Free Meals	36%	46%	39%
Family Counseling	8%	25%	12%
Child Protective Svcs	5%	11%	7%
Drug/Alcohol Treatment	10%	50%	21%
12-Step Program	17%	36%	22%
Medicaid/Medicare	32%	75%	44%
HIV Positive Diagnosis	1%	4%	2%
Budgeting/Life Skills	18%	36%	23%
GED/Literacy Program	13%	25%	16%
Church/Charity Assntnce	27%	43%	31%
Clothing Assistance	53%	61%	55%
Vocational Rehabilitation	42%	54%	45%
Public/Section 8 Housing	38%	61%	44%
Mentoring	10%	11%	10%

¹³ (X=5.6048, p<0.05, n=105); (X=19.4516, p<0.001, n=105); (X=4.2565, p<0.05, n=105); (X=15.0893, p<0.01, n=105); (X=4.4324, p<0.05, n=105)

JOB & INCOME OF POTENTIALLY HOMELESS INMATES EXITING PRISON

Nearly one quarter (21%) of potentially homeless inmates reported that they had no employment or income prospects upon release. Interestingly, the majority of inmates at risk for homelessness upon release from prison reported that a full-time, part-time or short-term job was a foreseeable prospect (53%).

Most (74%) of the potentially homeless inmates that reported some prospect for employment after release from prison reported that they expected to find a full-time job upon release. Table 4 shows the types of income expected by those 44 inmates that did not foresee finding a job upon release by gender.¹⁴

Table 4: Sources of income for potentially homeless inmates that did not expect to find a job at release from prison by gender

Income Source	Male (35)	Female (9)
None	19	4
Social Security	2	0
Disability Insurance	5	2
Unemployment Insurance	3	0
Retirement Income	1	0
Food Stamp Benefits	6	3
Veterans Benefits	1	0
Work First/Family Asst.	0	2
Panhandle/Beg	3	1
Collect Recyclables	0	0
Sell Personal Items	1	1
Sell Blood/Sperm	1	0
Alimony/Child Support	0	0
Illegal Activities	0	1
Friends/Family Aid	1	3
Church/Charity	1	2
Total Responses	44	19

HOMELESSNESS IN THE COMMUNITY OFFENDER POPULATION ASSIGNED TO SUBSTANCE ABUSE TREATMENT¹⁵

DART Cherry is a residential substance abuse treatment facility for adult male offenders on probation, parole or

¹⁴ Multiple responses were accepted for this question.

¹⁵ Because many of the offenders entering the 28-day program are arriving directly from prison as a condition of parole, their responses were not considered in this particular analysis.

post-release for alcohol or drug related offenses or who have a documented substance abuse problem that would place them at risk for revocation or recidivism.

There are two different types of programs at this unit: the 28-day program and the 90-day program. During the study period, we received responses from 310 offenders placed in the 28-day program and 299 offenders placed in the 90-day program.

Approximately 4% of offenders entering the 90-day program at the DART-Cherry facility reported answers consistent with the Federal definition of homelessness. Most community offenders that were homeless prior to entering DART-Cherry reported that they lived on the street (75%); 17% reported that they lived in a vehicle, tent, or camper; 8% reported that they lived in an emergency shelter.

The most frequently reported amount of time homeless was 7 days or less. The same number of offenders also reported at least 6 but less than 12 months of homelessness. Similar lengths of stay were reported regardless of the last place these offenders resided.

Community offenders that were homeless were no more likely to report unemployment prior to entering the facility than were non-homeless community offenders (50% and 35%, respectively). There was no reliable difference in reported hourly wages for working community offenders who were homeless compared to working community offenders who were not homeless.

PATTERNS OF HOMELESSNESS IN COMMUNITY OFFENDERS ASSIGNED TO RESIDENTIAL SUBSTANCE ABUSE TREATMENT

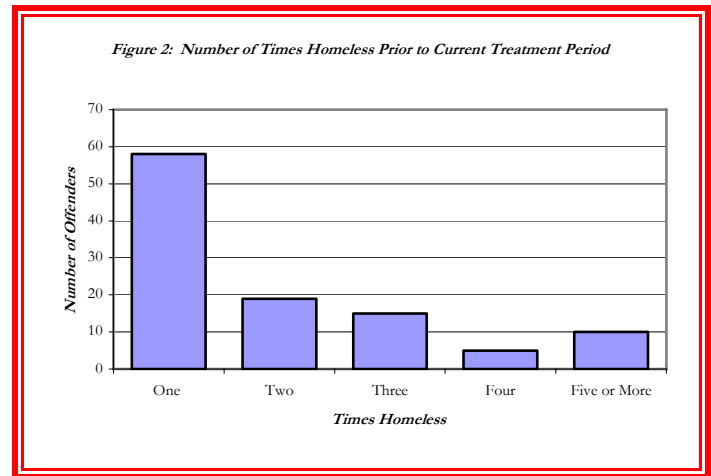
A majority of the community offenders that were homeless prior to entering the DART Cherry facility reported multiple experiences associated with either transitional or chronic homelessness (88%).

In the year before admission to the DART Cherry facility, a majority of the homeless community offenders reported a loss of job or benefits (56%) and half reported that they had been unable to pay bills. The great majority (94%) reported an episode of drug or alcohol abuse. Domestic disruptions (divorce or separation, domestic violence, or loss of parental rights) were reported by half of homeless community offenders. Less than one quarter (19%) reported a major health problem or physical disability.

EPISODES OF HOMELESSNESS IN COMMUNITY OFFENDERS ASSIGNED TO RESIDENTIAL SUBSTANCE ABUSE TREATMENT

Slightly less than one-quarter (20%) of all responding community offenders, including those in the 28-day program, reported that they had been homeless at some time in their lives. Figure 2 shows the number of times these offenders were homeless prior to the most recent residential substance abuse treatment period.

When asked to report on the factors leading to their episodes of homelessness, most offenders (55%) pointed to only one factor. Approximately 16% identified two factors, 25% identified three or more factors.



Factors cited most frequently as contributing to homeless episodes were drug or alcohol abuse (53%), unemployment or lack of money (42%), evictions (23%), separation or divorce (22%), and criminal convictions (21%).

PROJECTED HOMELESSNESS IN COMMUNITY OFFENDERS EXITING RESIDENTIAL SUBSTANCE ABUSE TREATMENT

Approximately 8% of community offenders entering either the 28-day or the 90-day program at DART-Cherry provided responses that were consistent with future homelessness. Most of these offenders (85%) reported that they did not know where they would live after release from the facility. Approximately 10% reported that they would live in a vehicle, camper, or tent; 2% reported that they would go to an emergency shelter; slightly more than 2% reported that they would live on the streets.

Among community offenders exiting into potential homelessness, less than one-third expect to live with family after release from prison (32%) while most expect that they will live alone after release (70%).¹⁶

¹⁶ Multiple responses were accepted for this question. Most offenders at DART-Cherry reported only one response.

PROJECTED SERVICE NEEDS FOR POTENTIALLY HOMELESS COMMUNITY OFFENDERS EXITING RESIDENTIAL SUBSTANCE ABUSE TREATMENT

With respect to anticipated needs upon release from substance abuse treatment, potentially homeless community offenders at the DART Cherry facility reported a demand for a variety of services. A great majority (87%) reported need for more than one service – approximately 63% reported between two and seven different services. Table 5 shows the percentage of community offenders that responded ‘yes’ to each service needed at release.

Table 5: Services needed at release for potentially homeless community offenders assigned to DART-Cherry facility by program length

Service	28 Day (23)	90 Day (18)	Total Percent 'Yes'
Legal Aid	22%	22%	22%
Veteran's Assistance	4%	0%	2%
Sex. Assault Counseling	4%	0%	2%
Employment Training	39%	33%	37%
Mental Health Care	17%	28%	22%
Food Pantry/Free Meals	39%	28%	34%
Family Counseling	13%	0%	7%
Child Protective Svcs	0%	0%	0%
Drug/Alcohol Treatment	43%	17%	32%
12-Step Program	48%	33%	41%
Medicaid/Medicare	48%	44%	46%
HIV Positive Diagnosis	0%	6%	2%
Budgeting/Life Skills	30%	28%	29%
GED/Literacy Program	22%	6%	15%
Church/Charity Assntce	43%	17%	32%
Clothing Assistance	61%	33%	49%
Vocational Rehabilitation	52%	22%	39%
Public/Section 8 Housing	26%	28%	27%
Mentoring	13%	0%	7%

Nearly half (49%) of all potentially homeless community offenders reported a need for clothing assistance, while only slightly fewer reported that they would need assistance from Medicaid / Medicare (46%).

A similar percentage reported they would need a 12-step program (41%). More than one-third reported a need for employment services including vocational rehabilitation (39%), employment training (37%) and assistance with

finding food (34%). More than one-quarter reported that they anticipated a need for drug or alcohol treatment (32%), life skills (29%), housing (27%) and charity assistance (32%).

JOBS & INCOME OF POTENTIALLY HOMELESS COMMUNITY OFFENDERS EXITING RESIDENTIAL SUBSTANCE ABUSE TREATMENT

Approximately one-third (32%) of potentially homeless community offenders exiting drug treatment reported that they had no prospects for employment or income upon release. However, the remaining offenders at risk for homelessness upon release from DART-Cherry reported that a full-time, part-time, or short-term job was a foreseeable prospect. Most of these 27 offenders reported that they expected to find a full-time job upon release. Table 6 shows a count of the types of income expected by offenders upon release from DART-Cherry.¹⁷

Table 6: Sources of income for potentially homeless offenders exiting the DART-Cherry facility by program length

Income Source	28 Day (23)	90 Day (17)
None	6	7
Social Security	4	3
Disability Insurance	4	3
Unemployment Insurance	1	1
Retirement Income	1	0
Food Stamp Benefits	7	4
Veterans Benefits	0	1
Work First/Family Asst.	0	1
Panhandle/Beg	0	1
Collect Recyclables	1	0
Sell Personal Items	0	0
Sell Blood/Sperm	0	1
Alimony/Child Support	1	1
Illegal Activities	0	1
Friends/Family Aid	7	1
Church/Charity	4	1
Short-term Job	3	0
Part-time Job	6	4
Full-time Job	11	3
Total Responses	36	26

¹⁷ One offender in the 90-day program did not report on their potential sources of future income.

FOCUS ON HOMELESSNESS WITHIN NCDOC AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Through membership on the Interagency Council for Coordinating Homeless Programs, the Department of Correction continues to be active in efforts to address homelessness within North Carolina. Additional research on homelessness will help the Department maintain its efforts to gain a more complete understanding of homelessness issues for individuals released from state prisons and correctional centers.

Information gained from this research will also be useful in the Department's efforts to engage community resources that assist offenders upon release and thus help to address the underlying causes of homelessness for our offender population.

If you need additional information, please contact David Edwards or Stephan Kiefer with the NCDOC Office of Research and Planning at 919-716-3080.