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Homeless Count in Chittenden County Shows Mixed Results

The Chittenden County Homeless Alliance's collaborative campaign to end homelessness is showing reductions in family, chronic and unsheltered homelessness and an increase in single adults sheltered in motels; the Alliance is moving forward with better ways to focus community resources.

Burlington, Vermont – Homelessness and housing leaders announced today an increase in the number of people experiencing homelessness in Chittenden County during the annual Point in Time count conducted January 31, 2018. The total number increased from 291 in 2017 to 359 this year. While the overall increase is cause for concern, other indicators imbedded in the count demonstrate progress.

Point in Time counts are conducted nationally each year in January and represent a one-night count of those experiencing “literal homelessness,” meaning individuals and families who live in a place not meant for human habitation (including the streets or in their car), emergency shelter, transitional housing, and hotels paid for by a government or charitable organization.

In Chittenden County, the January 2018 Point in Time Count showed, for the fourth year in a row, continuing reductions in:

- The number of people experiencing “chronic homelessness,” a HUD term meaning people living with disabilities who experience extended bouts of homelessness. That number has dropped from 76 people in 2014 to 44 people in 2017 to 35 people in 2018.
- The number of families with children experiencing homelessness. That number has dropped from 73 families in 2014 to 37 families in 2017 to 33 families in 2018.
- The number of people living “unsheltered,” meaning outside or in places not meant for human habitation. This year, there were only 15 unsheltered people, down from 69 in 2014 and 22 in 2017.

The notable reduction in chronic homelessness corresponds with the Chittenden County Homeless Alliance's focus on a “Housing First” model, which prioritizes moving homeless people into housing and then providing wraparound services such as counseling and job training, and with the use of a community master list for helping people into housing. The Alliance believes that in the next three years, it can virtually eliminate chronic homelessness.



The decrease in family homelessness reflects community collaboration in aligning the three things it takes to get and keep people housed: the housing itself, rental subsidy to ensure that the housing is affordable, and services to help people achieve housing stability.

The overall increase in this year's numbers was driven by the number of single adults in shelter, primarily in motels through the state's emergency housing program. There were adverse weather conditions on the night of the count, which means that more people qualified for emergency housing and which may have increased the number of people sheltered in motels.

This increase shows that there is more work to be done to make homelessness in Chittenden County rare and brief. To help reach that goal, the Alliance is expanding a strategy known as a "community master list," which is a single, comprehensive, person-specific list of people experiencing or at risk of homelessness throughout Chittenden County, with an associated assessment of service needs. The community master list facilitates streamlined consumer access to appropriate resources. This strategy began in Burlington in 2014 for people experiencing chronic homelessness and is expanding after a community "Action Lab" with Homeless Alliance members that took place in April of this year.

"We are continuing to make progress as a community addressing homelessness by focusing resources on our most vulnerable and pursuing innovative new strategies," said Mayor Miro Weinberger "With our continued effort to increase the supply of housing of all types, and with the help of more timely and comprehensive data about homeless individuals living in our communities, I believe we can bring an end to chronic homelessness in Chittenden County."

Margaret Bozik, Co-Chair of the Chittenden County Homeless Alliance and Director of Asset Management & Special Initiatives at Champlain Housing Trust, agreed with the Mayor and added: "In response to the increase in emergency housing usage, we are looking for better ways to connect quickly with people accessing emergency housing during adverse weather conditions. If we can better understand what their current living situations are and make sure that, where appropriate, they're on the community master list, we can help them to access housing resources."

By June, the Alliance plans to have in place a single, community-wide list of single adults experiencing homelessness, so that resources can be collectively focused on housing these individuals. By December, this list will be expanded to include families and youth. Once in place, the list will provide near real time data on who and how many people are experiencing homelessness – who and how many people are becoming homeless or returning to homelessness each month, who and how many are becoming housed, who is not becoming housed and why not. With this information, we can collectively make optimal use of our resources to help people achieve long-term housing stability.

The Chittenden County Homeless Alliance is a coalition of individuals, organizations, and government who support our vision of a safe, decent, affordable, stable home for every person and family in Chittenden County. Its mission is to end homelessness in Chittenden County by being a forum for gathering information, building consensus, coordinating efforts, and advocating the end of homelessness through prevention, early intervention, and remediation.