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August 31, 2010

2010 Cambridge Homeless Census Report

On January 27, 2010, hundreds of communities across the country conducted their annual homeless census. For the cities of Cambridge and Somerville, it was their eleventh joint census. The count of sheltered and transitionally housed persons was completed by municipal staff. The survey of unsheltered men and women was accomplished by seven teams that followed a series of prescribed routes through the two cities during the pre-dawn hours. The teams, composed of a mix of homeless program staff and volunteers, were led primarily by street outreach workers from CASPAR's First Step program, with radio and emergency backup from Professional Ambulance and Cambridge Multi-Service Center staff.

According to Fred Berman, a Planner with the Cambridge Department of Human Service Programs and one of the two Census Coordinators, "after last year's drop-off in the number of homeless individuals, the January 2010 census reported a shelter count (193 persons) that was back to levels seen in 2007 and 2008; a "street count" (61 persons) that paralleled the street count in 2008; and a sharp decrease in the number of homeless families, reflecting a reduction in the number of State funded units of family shelter in Cambridge (from 32 to 27 units), and a 48% decrease (from 73 to 38) in the number of homeless metro-Boston families temporarily sheltered by the State at the Cambridge Gateway Inn." Overall, the census recorded an overall 12% decrease in homelessness in Cambridge, from 637 persons in January 2009 to 559 persons in 2010."

Meghan Goughan, Director of CASPAR's First Step Street Outreach Program, and the other Census Coordinator, indicated that "counting the unsheltered homeless is an inexact science, and is largely weather-dependent. This year's street count (61 persons) marks a return to the numbers reported by the 2008 street census (60 persons), both of which took place in mild winter conditions. In all probability, last year's street count (40 persons) was so much lower because icy conditions on city streets and the foot of snow blanketing open spaces forced otherwise unsheltered homeless persons into more protected settings. (Annual counts of unsheltered homeless individuals also include tallies of hospitalized persons identified as homeless by Health Care for the Homeless staff. At the time of the 2010 census, there were 9 such persons in Cambridge Health Alliance facilities; last year, the count was 3; in 2008, the count was 2.)"

Ellen Semonoff, Assistant City Manager for Human Services, noted that changes in the number of homeless families counted by the census reflect statewide trends. "The State's family shelters have been filled to capacity for a number of years. Over the past two years, the number of homeless families who had to be sheltered in motels like the Cambridge Gateway Inn increased from a few dozen to over 1,100. An aggressive statewide effort to use federal Stimulus funds to move families out of motels and to prevent new homelessness has resulted in a net decrease of about 200 families in motels. In Cambridge alone, 95 households have received rental or utility assistance to prevent or end their homelessness."

"As we have said before, however, any homelessness is too much," continued Ms. Semonoff. "As is the case throughout America, a depressed economy has caused us to lose ground in our efforts to address homelessness, both in Cambridge and in the larger Metro Boston area. While the cost of rental housing and living expenses have remained relatively unchanged, household incomes have fallen due to lost or reduced wages, pushing many families and individuals over the brink."

"The City is fortunate to have received Stimulus funding to help these households, and we look forward to continuing to leverage our partnerships with the State, with HUD, and with local non-profits to ensure that Cambridge residents receive the help they need to remain housed until they are able to regain their footing in the economy."

Individuals	2006 Census	2007 Census	2008 Census	2009 Census	2010 Census
Street Homelessness	36 +8 inpatients in CHAlliance facilities	54 + 2 inpatients in CHAlliance facilities	60 +2 inpatients in CHAlliance facilities	40 + 3 inpatients in CHAlliance facilities	61 + 9 inpatients in CHAlliance facilities
Shelter Homelessness (See Note #1)	200 individuals	191 individuals	193 individuals	179 individuals	193 individuals
Total Census of Homeless Adults (not accompanied by families)	244 individuals	247 individuals	255 individuals	222 individuals	263 individuals

Note #1: As of 2007 the capacity of Cambridge shelters for individuals decreased by virtue of the State's no longer funding overflow capacity at the Salvation Army and First Church. The capacity of Cambridge transitional housing programs for individuals has decreased from 118 beds to 85 beds for a variety of reasons over the past five years, including re-purposing as permanent supported housing.

Families	2006 Census	2007 Census	2008 Census	2009 Census	2010 Census
Shelter Homelessness (See Note #2)	31 sheltered families + 0 families in motels	28 sheltered families + 0 families in motels	31 sheltered families + 5 families in motels	32 sheltered families + 73 families in motels	27 sheltered families + 38 families in motels
Total Census of Homeless Families	31 families	28 families	36 families	105 families	65 families

Note #2: From year to year, the Cambridge Continuum's capacity to shelter families fluctuates by 1-2 families as Transition House shifts its use of program beds to serve fewer individuals and more families (or vice versa), or as one or more large families at the Hildebrand occupies the space that two smaller families might occupy. In FY 2010, the Hildebrand's capacity decreased by 5 families due to a State funding decision. Also, the counts of families in shelter and motels decreased because the number of family shelter units in Cambridge was reduced as part of the DTA/DHCD re-contracting process, and because the number of motel units used by the State dropped by almost 50% from 77 to 38. Overall, the number of motel units statewide dropped from a high of 1,100 to about 930 at the time of the census.)

Finally, transitional housing clients are tracked by HUD and reported as part of the census; however, when HUD refers to the "homeless count" and measures changes in homelessness, they are only referring to sheltered and unsheltered persons (including homeless persons who were inpatients in health care facilities, if those persons would have been otherwise sheltered or on the street). The slight declines in the numbers of individuals and families in transitional housing reflect the re-purposing of some transitional units to permanent supported housing.

Transitional Housing	2006 Census	2007 Census	2008 Census	2009 Census	2010 Census
Individual Units	115 individuals	99 individuals	104 individuals	81 individuals	77 individuals
Family Units	7 families	5 families	15 families	24 families	18 families