

PRESS RELEASE

FROM: BETHEL COMMUNITY SERVICES FOUNDATION

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RE: Oct 2019 Bethel Point in Time Homelessness Data Collection

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

On October 26, 2019, 47 people were identified as possibly or definitely homeless in Bethel, with another 2 who were at risk of homelessness.

This information was provided by the Bethel Housing and Homelessness Coalition, which conducted a point-in-time homelessness data collection effort at the Project Homeless Connect event on October 26.

Project Homeless Connect events, which are led by the Kuskokwim Consortium Library, are provided in order to bring a variety of services to people in need in a convenient one-stop location. People experiencing housing instability can stop for a hot meal, laundry tokens, hair cuts, warm clothes and information from a variety of agencies including Public Health, AVCP Housing, and YKHC outreach departments.

“One data point we collected for the first time in October measured where people experiencing homelessness in Bethel are from, where they want to live, and what type of assistance they want,” said Eileen Arnold, Tundra Women’s Coalition executive director. “I think some people in Bethel have the perception that folks homeless here may be from surrounding communities, find themselves stuck in Bethel and would prefer to return back to their hometown. Based on what people told us, the perception that people would prefer not to be in Bethel is inaccurate.”

The data collected shows that 77% of folks interviewed were from a neighboring YK Delta community. But 86% of all people surveyed have been living in Bethel for the past year. Only 14% of participants said they wanted relocation assistance. 80% of people said the form of assistance they want is a permanent place to live, with 71% of those requesting permanent housing clarifying that they want to live only in Bethel.

“It’s clear from this survey that people who are living in Bethel without a house want permanent housing, and they want it to be here,” said Michelle DeWitt, Bethel Community Services Foundation executive director. “Assuming we continue to receive similar feedback, I think it’s very clear to the Coalition that we need to work on developing a local housing option.”

Slightly more than half of people were male and less than half were female, 88% were Alaska Native/American Indian. Ages ranged from 21-78. Only adults were counted on this day. When asked, the most frequent response was that they spent the previous night with family or friends, followed by Tundra Women's Coalition shelter. After those two locations, sleeping in a vehicle or abandoned building were the next most common responses. Winter House Shelter was not yet open for the season on October 26, so no one spent that night at Winter House Shelter. Of the 35 people asked, 26% reported they had been homeless one year or longer.

Thirty-five people participated in the survey portion of the data collection, which was conducted in an interview-style format.

For 63% of the survey takers, this was not their first time homeless. That group had experienced an average 5.8 years of housing instability. 29% of survey takers reported being on the streets or in shelter four or more times in the past three years. Of all survey takers, 97% (all but one person) had stayed in an emergency shelter or on the streets at least once in their lifetime. The one other person had only stayed with family or friends.

“Just over half of those surveyed report that they have been on the streets or in emergency shelter for more than 12 months in the past 3 years.” said Ariel Herman, contract Project Analyst with the Bethel Community Services Foundation. “That means for half of the people surveyed, even if they *currently* are not experiencing a long episode of homelessness, they have experienced a long episode of homelessness *recently*. And for the other half, it means this homeless experience is potentially new and hopefully brief. That can indicate that we need multiple types of services--both stop gaps like emergency shelters and long-term solutions like affordable, permanent supportive housing.”

One year ago, the Coalition began using Project Homeless Connect events to learn more about the conditions experienced by people who are unhoused. The Coalition plans to use the information gathered for the purpose of developing projects and interventions that match what recipients want and need. The collection included both observations and surveys conducted by Coalition volunteers with homeless individuals. Most data was collected on October 26, 2019, a rainy day (43°F) at Project Homeless Connect, with two additional surveys done at the Tundra Women's Coalition (domestic violence/sexual assault program that includes an emergency shelter) on October 28, 2019. The Coalition conducted another event in January 2020; those data results will be released later this year.

The Bethel Housing and Homelessness Coalition is continuing to assess housing and homelessness data, needs, and services to better support people experiencing homelessness in our community. To learn more about the Coalition's efforts or to support them, contact Eileen Arnold with Tundra Women's Coalition (Eileen_arnold@tundrapeace.org) or Michelle DeWitt with Bethel Community Services Foundation (michelle@bcsfoundation.org).

Arnold said, “The Housing & Homelessness Coalition was started over three years ago with enthusiastic support from a wide variety of community agencies and community volunteers and members. There are a lot of people who care about providing services for our most vulnerable and making this a community that drives evidence-based solutions for complicated issues like homelessness.”

The October 2019 Bethel Homelessness Point-in-Time Data Collection report can be found on the websites of several participating organizations- including bcsfoundation.org, tundrapeace.org and bethelwinterhouse.org.