

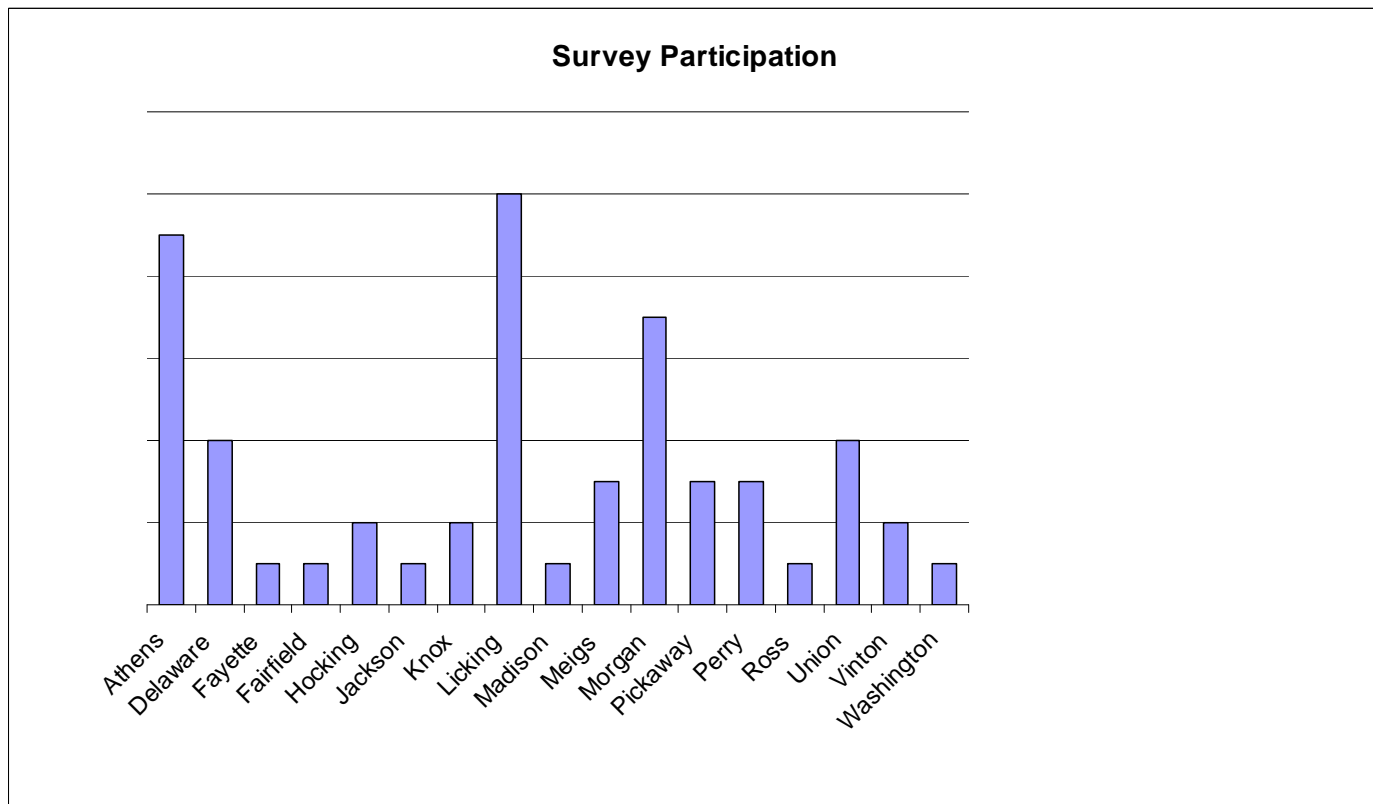
RHISCO Anonymous Stakeholder Survey Report

The RHISCO Anonymous Stakeholder Survey was emailed to approximately 150 residents of the seventeen Rural Southeastern and Central Ohio counties that comprise the RHISCO Project. These community stakeholders were identified by the primary and secondary contacts for each county and by available county Continuum of Care lists. Of these individuals, fifty-one people responded during the five days that the survey was online. All but two of the seventeen partner counties had participation, though some had more representation than others.

In this narrative, we will attempt to analyze each question in a broad regional context. Detailed quantitative information for each question follows.

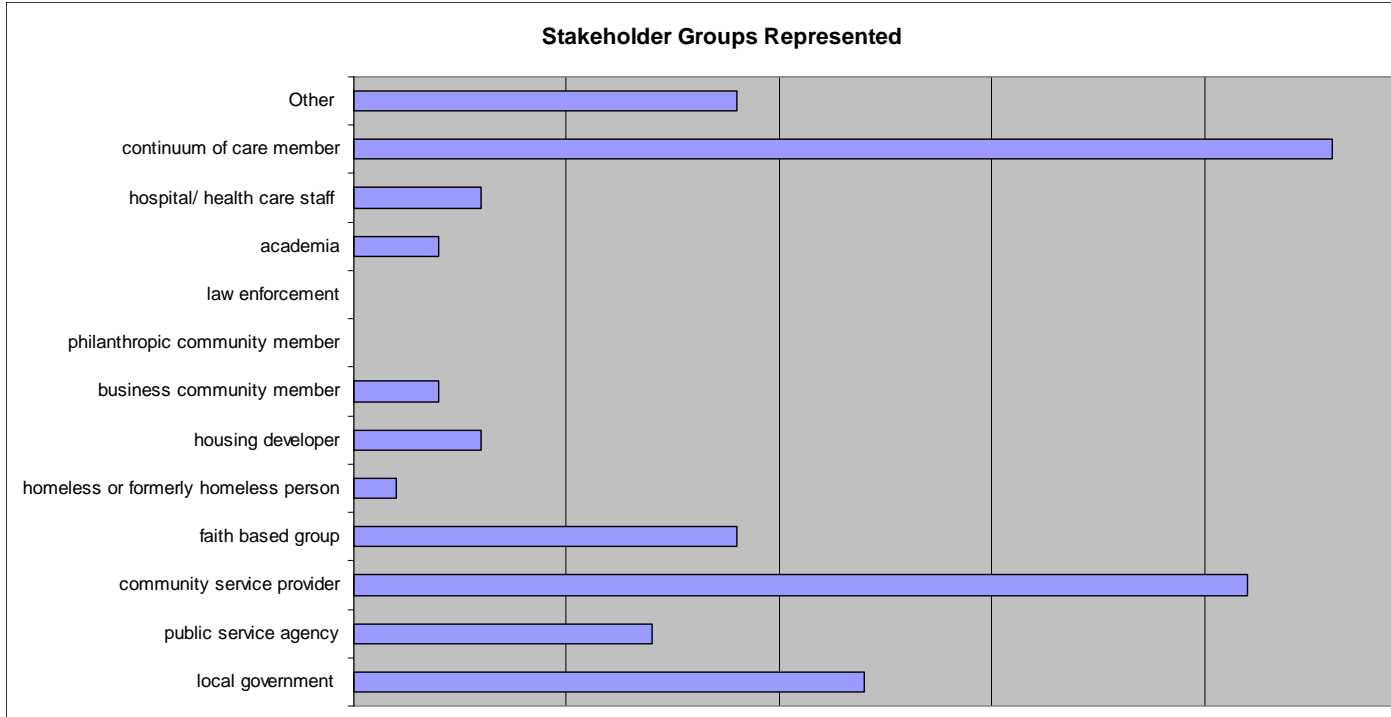
1. What RHISCO county do you consider to be your community?

Every county participated in the survey. There is a possibility that some people identify with more than one county and thus these two are in some way represented. Of the participating counties, there was disproportionate participation from Athens, Licking and Morgan counties. These three counties comprised 34% of all respondents. The average was three respondents per county.



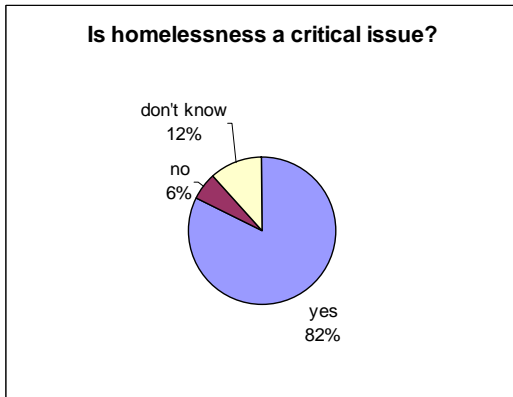
2. What stakeholder group do you represent in your community?

The most frequently cited answers were community service providers (both faith-based and secular) and local government or public service agencies. Of all respondents, nearly half were members of their local continuum of care. At this point in the project, there is very little representation of philanthropic and business communities, law enforcement, the medical community, or homeless people. While it is typical to have providers and local agencies take the lead in planning, these others are all important groups to have involved in this project in the future.



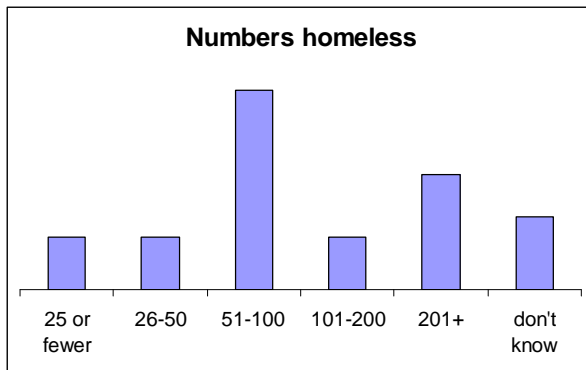
3. Is homelessness a critical issue in your community?

For this question, 82% of those responding identified that homelessness is a critical issue in their community. An additional 12% were unsure and only 6% determined that it is not.



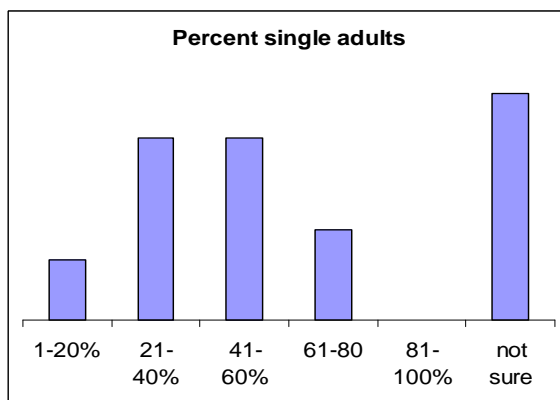
4. What would you estimate to be the number of homeless individuals in your community?

This question produced a wide variety of answers, and surely the distribution will vary county by county. The majority of those responding estimate there to be 51-100 homeless people in their community, with the next most frequent answer being 201+ homeless people. These numbers suggest that respondents feel that their point-in-time counts are inaccurate, as these estimates are much higher than actual point-in-time counts. This is consistent with concerns voiced about doubled-up people not being included in counts and the fact that counts only in January may skew the results, as your climate forces people inside during winter. The counties most frequently citing the highest estimates (201+) were Athens and Licking, though it is notable that six different counties had estimates of 201+ homeless people.



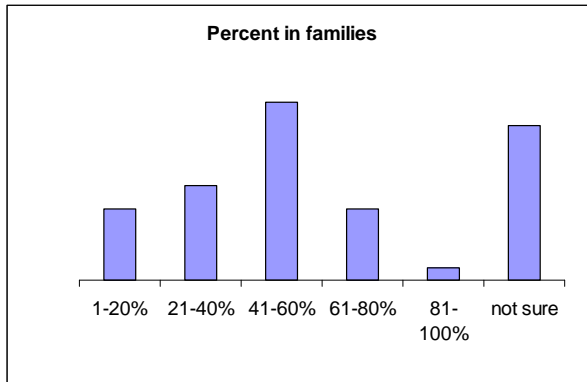
5. What percentage of your community's homeless population are single adults?

The majority of respondents estimated 21-60 % of their homeless population to be single adults, though there are a large number that were unsure. In fact, “not sure” was the most common answer. It is important to know the characteristics of the people you want to serve as this project moves forward. These demographic questions underscore the need for further and more detailed analysis of your region’s homeless population.



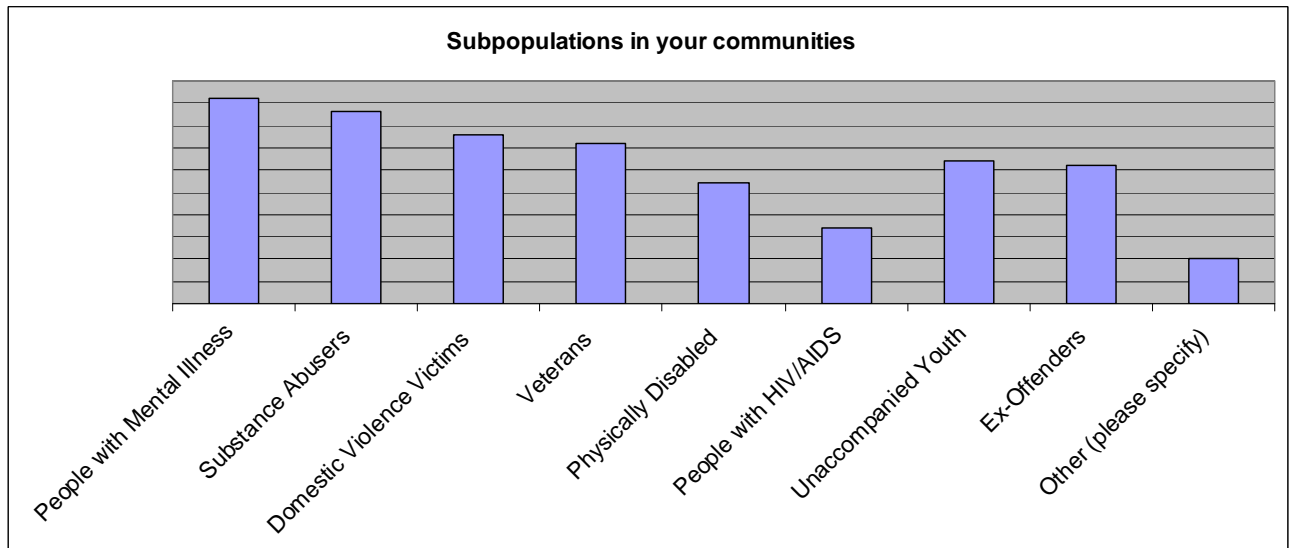
6. What percentage of your community's homeless population is comprised of families?

This question also left many unsure, though the most common answer was between 41-60% of the homeless population being families. Again, as the needs of singles and families are sometimes very different, it will be important to know the demographics of your homeless population. It is notable that the general consensus is that your community has more homeless in family units than homeless single adults.



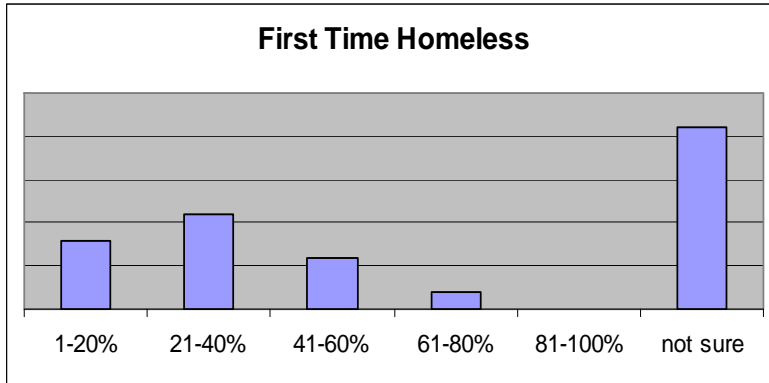
7. List the homeless "sub-populations" in your community

Every subpopulation listed was recognized by at least some respondents as comprising part of the homeless population of your region. The most frequently cited sub-populations for your communities were people experiencing mental illness or addiction, with domestic violence victims and veterans following close behind. The groups listed are all disproportionately likely to experience homelessness and any plan to address homelessness should take this into consideration. Groups cited that hadn't been included on the survey were: travelers/transients, people with developmental disabilities, people with a dual diagnosis, and those that don't fit a sub-population and are simply poor.



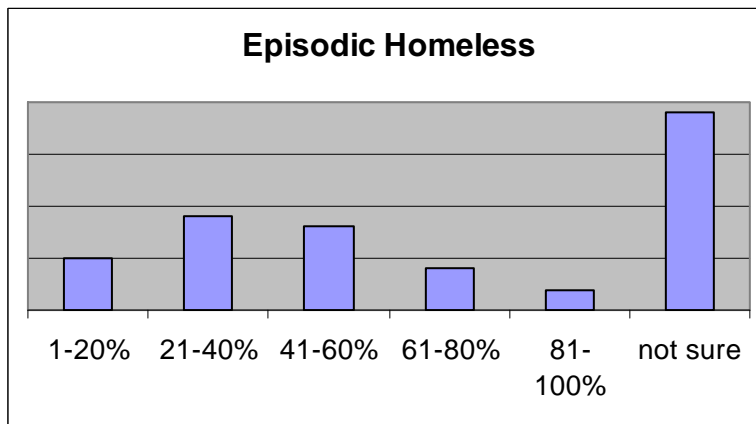
8. What percentage of homeless people in your community are homeless for the first time?

Most respondents were unsure about this question, though people estimating tended to put the number of first time homeless in the 21-40% range or less. Issues facing this group are often addressed through prevention measures in a plan to end homelessness.



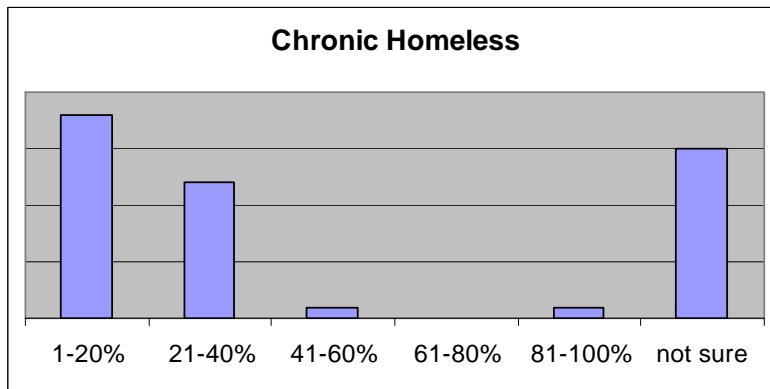
9. What percentage of homeless people in your community are episodically homeless?

Most respondents also were unsure about how many people in your community are episodically homeless. Those that estimated tended to put this group in a higher range than the number of first time homeless- in the 21-40% range or slightly higher in the 41-60% range. Many issues facing this group are addressed through service components, prevention measures and rapid re-housing initiatives of a plan to end homelessness.



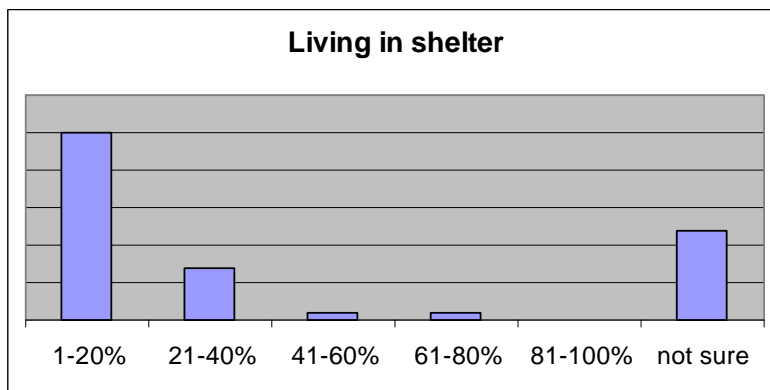
10. What percentage of homeless people in your community are chronically homeless?

While most respondents had difficulty identifying the percentages of first time and episodically homeless people in your communities, there seemed to be a general consensus that the proportion of chronically homeless in your communities is low. While some were still unsure, the majority of respondents put this figure at 1-20%, with a few guessing in the 21-40% range. Obtaining an accurate count of the chronically homeless in your communities will be crucial to planning, as this group tends to consume the vast majority of your resources. Strategies that have proven effective with chronically homeless people include low demand and permanent supportive housing.



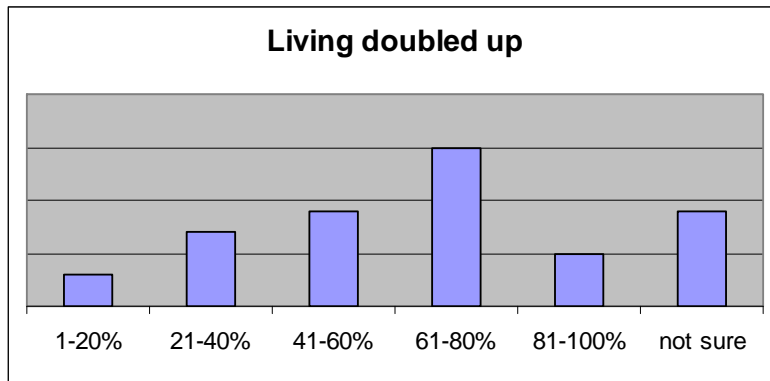
11. What percentage of homeless people in your community lives in shelter?

Very few of the respondents believe that the homeless of their community reside in shelter. The 1-20% group was cited almost 2:1 over all others. There are currently not enough shelter beds to meet the needs of the homeless population in your region as a whole, and many communities do not have shelter at all, or have specialized shelter (i.e. domestic violence) that is not designed to serve as a homeless shelter.



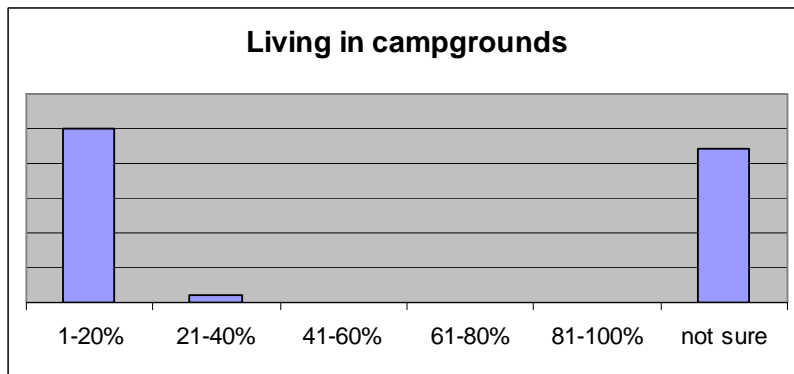
12. What percentage of homeless people in your community live "doubled up" with family or friends?

Overwhelmingly, this was the most popular choice among respondents for where the homeless in your community live. Most of those surveyed put 61-80% of their homeless population into this category. Partners have expressed their frustration with being unable to count this large number of people as part of your homeless population for HUD. In communities where a lot of people are doubled-up and at imminent risk of homelessness, it is crucial to make systemic changes that can address their needs before they become homeless. Having an accurate count of your doubled-up residents will be crucial.



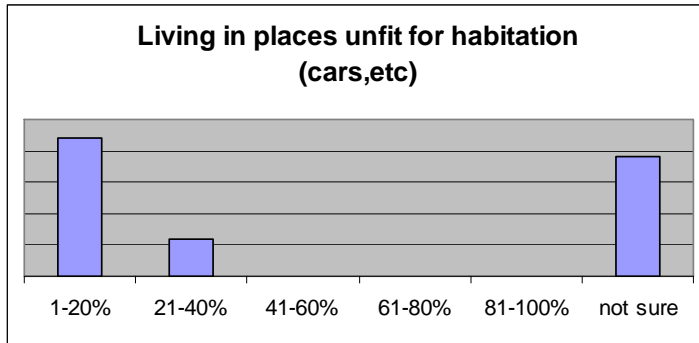
13. What percentage of homeless people in your community live in campgrounds?

Very few of those respondents believed that many homeless people were living in campgrounds. About half were unsure and another half said 1-20%.



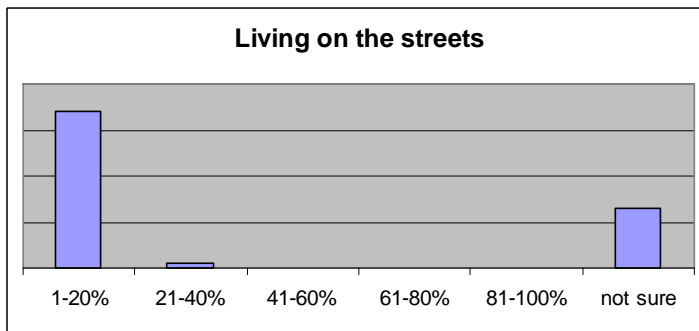
14. What percentage of homeless people in your community live in cars or other places unfit for habitation?

Slightly more of those surveyed thought that homeless people in their communities are living in cars or other places not fit for habitation. Many were unsure, but those responding put the figure at 1-20%, with a small group saying 21-40% live in these places.



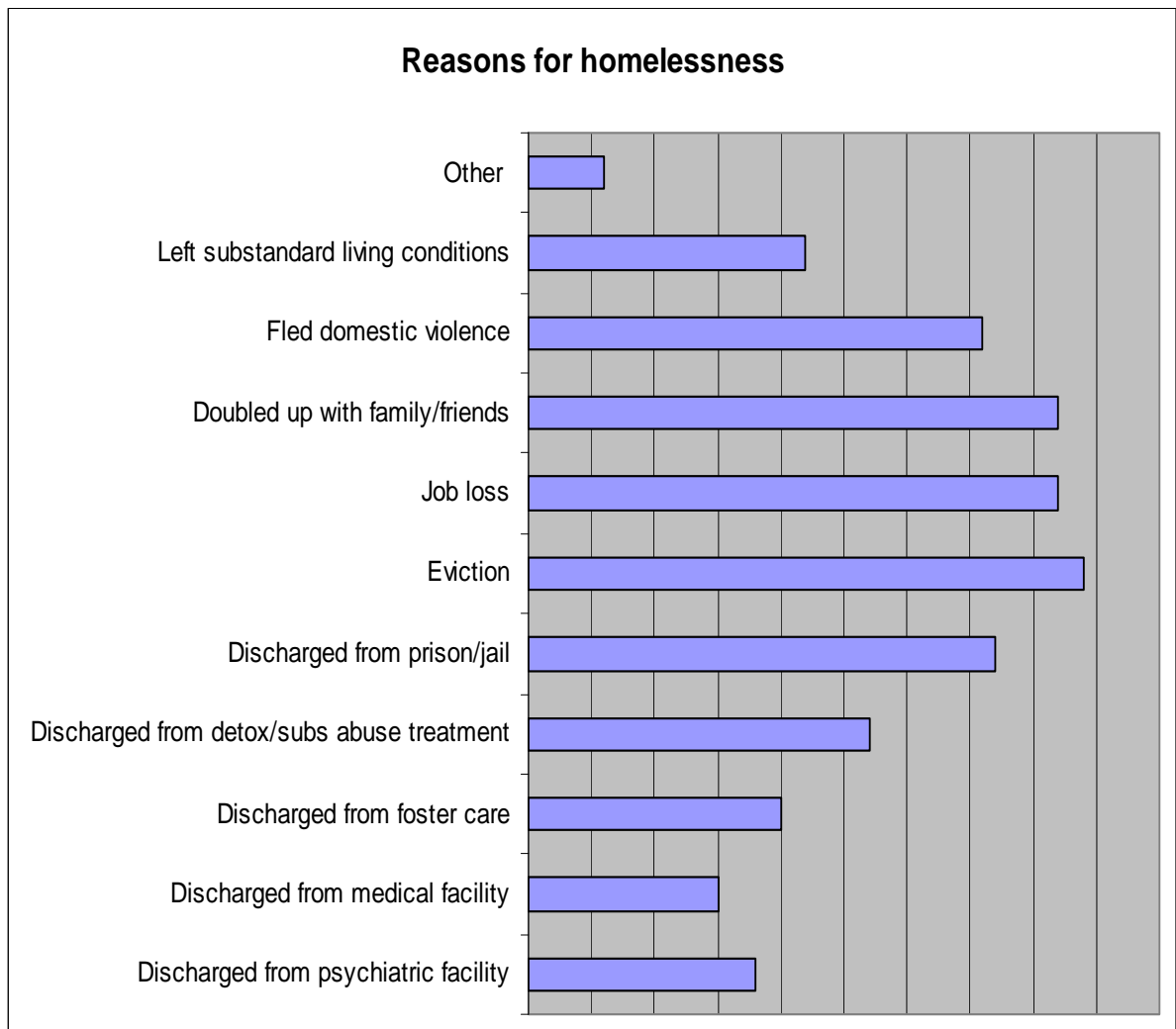
15. What percentage of homeless people in your community lives outside on the street?

The opinion of the majority of respondents is that only 1-20% of the homeless in your communities live outside on the street. A few were unsure, but most thought the figure was very low. This is consistent with rural communities elsewhere and according to many who left comments; it has been a barrier to gaining community recognition of the problem and to securing resources to address homelessness.



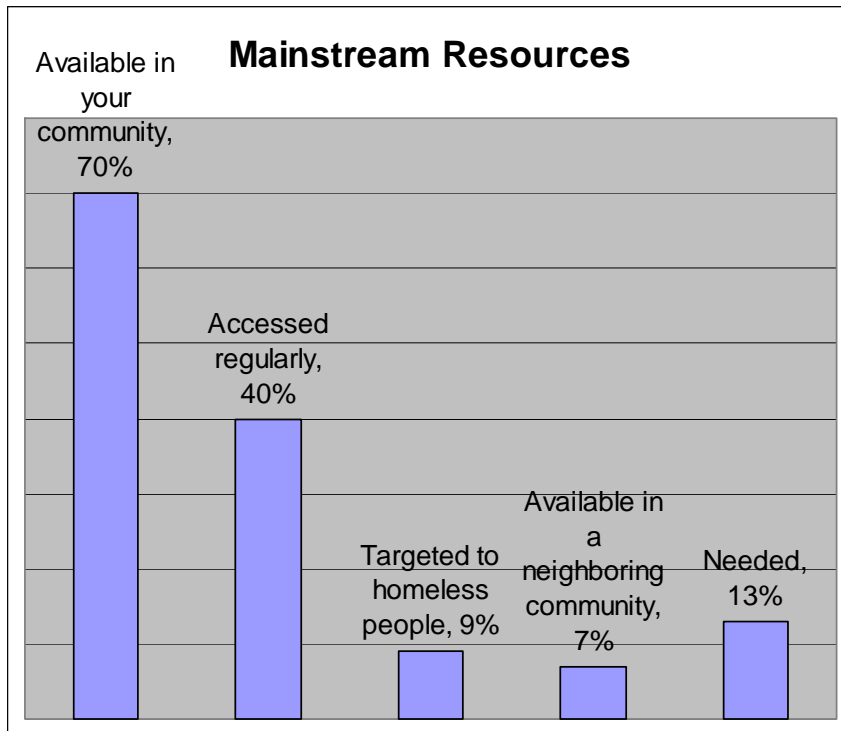
16. What reasons do people give for becoming homeless in your community?

Each of the reasons given in the survey for how a person might become homeless is valid in your communities. The most frequently cited reasons specific to the RHISCO Project area are eviction, followed by job loss, leaving a doubled-up living situation, domestic violence and discharge from prison/jail. Some additional reasons given for homelessness in your communities are runaways, divorce, poverty other than job loss, being kicked out by family, and elderly without supports. A plan for ending homelessness should address all of these issues.



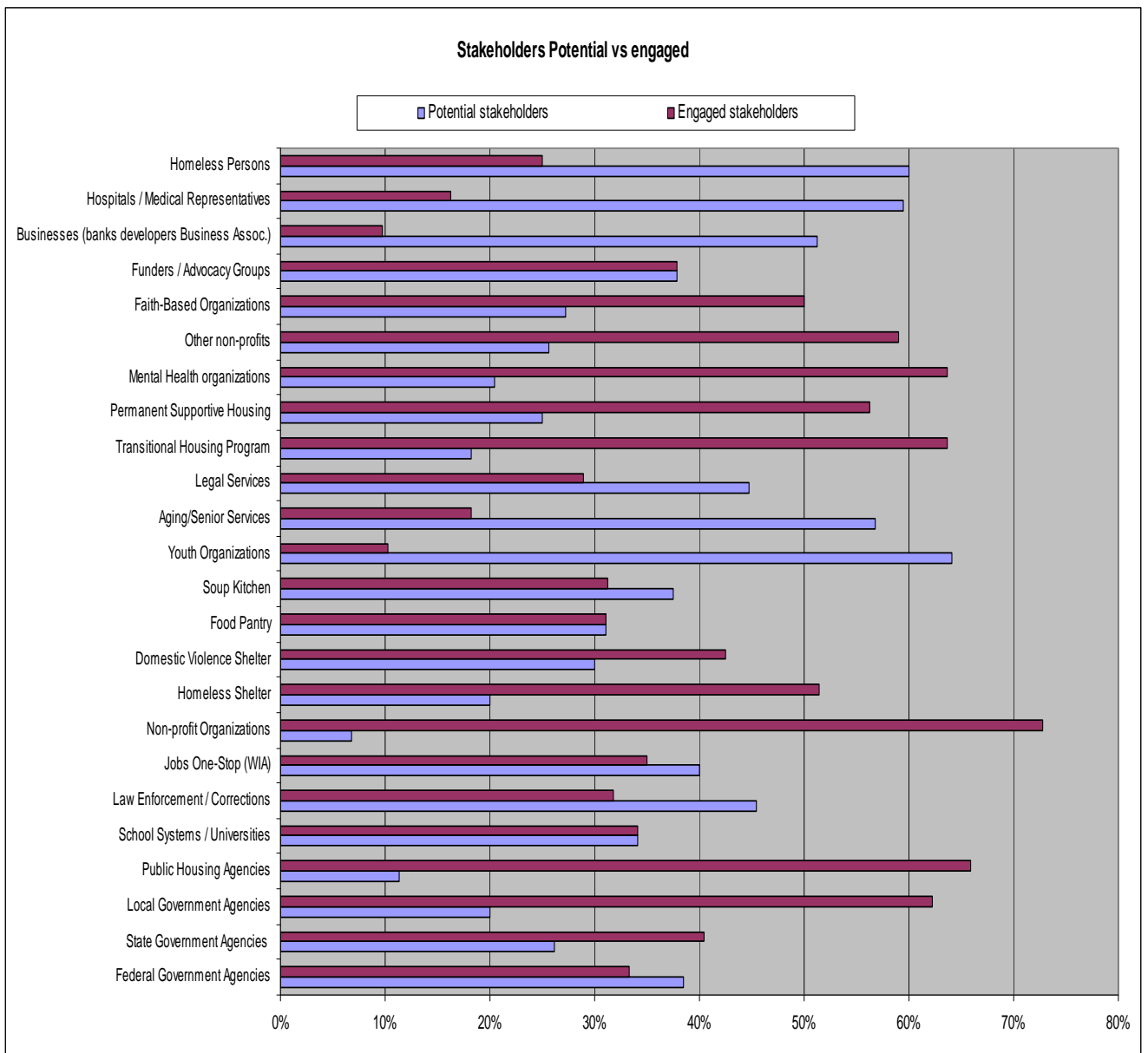
17. Which of the listed resources is available in your community?

For this question, respondents identified that 70% of these resources are available in their community, with an additional 7% stating that the resources are not available in their immediate community, but in a neighboring one. This demonstrates a high level of awareness among currently engaged stakeholders about the mainstream resources that are available to people in your community. It is important to note that each of the federal and state resources listed is available to residents of your community, though some may require travel to another community within the region, which is recognized as a barrier in a rural area that lacks public transportation. A notable find from this question is that respondents believe that only 9% of these services are targeted to homeless people. The most important measure of efficacy of mainstream resources for prevention is whether or not these resources are fully accessed. Respondents in general felt that mainstream resources in your community are not, with only 40% being of the opinion that these programs are regularly accessed. If this is the case, it is an area to address. Accessing and maximizing these mainstream programs can be a crucial prevention measure to consider in your plan. The most frequently cited need for service in your communities is eviction prevention, health care programs, rent/mortgage/utility assistance, soup kitchens, and more public housing.



18. Which of these groups is a potential stakeholder and which are actively engaged at this point?

Most respondents recognized that each of these groups is a potential stakeholder. There are considerable gaps in those that should be at the table and those that currently are participating in this project, however. The largest gaps are noted in the engagement of business, the medical community, homeless individuals, youth and senior organizations, legal services, and law enforcement. The most frequently cited potential opponents are federal and state governmental agencies, business and the medical community. It is important for opponents to also be part of this process, so that everyone in the community can appreciate the concerns of others and work together to create a shared vision that overcomes opposition.



Several respondents also had narrative comments that were helpful. Many of you acknowledged being in the beginning stages of addressing homelessness in your communities and that your community has faced difficulty understanding that homelessness is an issue when few of your homeless reside in the visible places where urban homeless people are typically found. Several of you stressed these differences, stating that your homeless neighbors tend to be doubled-up and adding that there are large numbers of your residents who are at risk of homelessness due to lack of resources and precarious housing situations.

The purpose of this survey was to gain insight into the awareness among various stakeholders in your region of the scope and nature of homelessness for your individual communities. Based on the responses gathered, there are a number of areas that need attention as you begin to think about strategies to include in your planning process and in the final product- your plan to end homelessness. A few items to note include:

- The RHISCO partners need to gain more knowledge about the demographics of the homeless people that inhabit their community beyond point-in-time counts.
- The RHISCO partners need to gain more concrete knowledge about the paths to homelessness in their communities. For example, how many people annually become homeless due to eviction, domestic violence, etc?
- The RHISCO partners need to engage a broad range of stakeholders early in the planning process. This includes non-traditional stakeholders to overcome opposition and possibly become allies.

It is important to note that the RHISCO partners and stakeholders surveyed have a lot of assets going into this planning process. Among these are:

- A very engaged and committed provider and local government community.
- A great deal of collaboration already exists among your communities, as has been necessitated by the availability and accessibility of resources in a rural area.
- A strong recognition of areas that need to be strategically addressed is present in those that are already working with homeless people.

This Stakeholder Survey will be one part of a Community Baseline Assessment process that will also include information gathered about affordable housing availability, mainstream and targeted resources availability and utilization, and other baseline measures. These will be compiled into a Community Baseline Report for presentation at the June Summit. We look forward to continuing to work with you there.