

Springwater Corridor Survey of Houselessness

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Executive Summary

In June of 2016, Clackamas County Health, Housing and Human Services conducted a survey of 128 houseless individuals residing without permanent shelter along the Springwater Corridor Trail. From the data collected about this population, the following key findings stand out:

- Largely local, largely chronic. 83% of this population has lived in Oregon ten years or more, and most were last housed in the community in which they now sleep outside. Over 87% have been houseless a year or more.
- Service ready, but not service connected. Nearly 85% report having no caseworker or person helping to get housing, while most are interested in receiving services. The most common reason cited for why they had no caseworker: they don't know how to get one.
- Isolated from family, but connected to "street family". About 70% live outside without other family members, yet 71% live with a group. The most common reason cited for living on the Springwater Trail was the presence of friends there.
- Houselessness is an economic condition. The top factors cited as contributors to houselessness were job loss (41%) and eviction (40%). The most cited barriers to housing were lack of money and unemployment.
- For women, houselessness is intertwined with violence. Domestic violence was named as the fourth most common contributing factor, and 78% of those who cite this factor are women. The majority of women (and a minority of men) report having experienced violence and harassment since becoming houseless.

The following policy implications emerge from these findings:

- Meet people where they are. There is a systemic need for greater outreach capacity to connect houseless people to services. More shelter and temporary or transitional housing types need to be developed to accommodate the high numbers of chronically houseless.
- Expand housing options. There is a need for increased capacity to provide emergency, temporary, and transitional shelter or alternative housing to the long-term houseless of the County. There is a severe shortage of affordable housing and housing subsidies in the region, and Clackamas County has one of the lowest rental vacancy rates in the nation.
- Leverage local community resources. Since most of this population lost their housing in the same community in which they now live unsheltered, efforts to rehouse them in their community should be explored, including via partnerships with neighborhood churches, schools, service providers, etc. As housing is one of the social determinants of health, these partnerships should include involvement of local Coordinated Care Organizations.

Background

Beginning on May 13, 2016, representatives from Clackamas County's Department of Health, Housing, and Human Services (H3S) served on a multi-jurisdictional project team facilitated by Oregon Consensus for the purpose of collaborating to address concerns related to the high number of houseless individuals living along the Springwater Corridor Trail (Trail). The Trail is a 21 mile recreational use path that begins in Inner Southeast Portland and extends through Milwaukie, Outer Southeast Portland, and a portion of Gresham before terminating in Boring, OR. In addition to identifying salient issues such as limited collaboration across jurisdictions, the unique needs of the houseless, and the environmental impact on the areas surrounding the Trail, project team members noted a lack of data related to houseless individuals living along the Trail as an impediment to generating potential solutions.

Based on this feedback, we were tasked by Richard Swift, Director of H3S, with developing a survey to collect relevant data directly from houseless individuals living along the Trail. The resulting 21-item survey, comprised of multiple choice items, rating scales, and narrative items, was designed to capture:

- demographic data;
- factors that led to houselessness;
- factors that contributed to deciding to live along the Trail;
- the experience of being houseless and living along the Trail;
- current barriers to becoming housed; and
- current service connections and needs.

Data collection for the survey was conducted by and coordinated by one of the authors (Vahid Brown) and the data were then compiled and analyzed by the other author (Erin Schwartz). The methodology and results are described and discussed below.

Discussion of Key Findings and Policy Implications

This survey is the most extensive of its kind that we know of for our region, and its findings can help inform public policy as it relates to the needs of houseless people. As explored further below, the findings of the survey are largely – but not entirely – consistent with other surveys of the region's houseless population. It is important to note in this regard that this survey differs significantly from the other available source of extensive demographic data on houseless people in the region, the HUD-mandated biannual Point In Time (PIT) counts.

The PIT counts, last taken in Clackamas and Multnomah Counties in January of 2015, include people who are sleeping in emergency shelters and transitional housing along with people who are unsheltered, while our survey was exclusive to unsheltered houseless people. The HUD PIT count also defines the chronically homeless as people with a disabling condition who have been either continuously homeless for a year or more or had had at least four episodes of homelessness in the past three years. Our survey did not capture data on disabling conditions, and our use of the term "chronically houseless" refers to people who had lived outside for a year or more. Adjusting for these differences, our survey both reinforces recent findings in regional PIT counts and undermines some commonly stated generalizations about houseless people. We will highlight our findings in the following sections.

General Demographics

In terms of gender, age, and race/ethnicity, our survey respondents were similar to the “chronically homeless” counted in the 2015 Clackamas PIT count. Greater Clackamas County’s chronically homeless were predominantly male (66%) and predominantly 40 years and older (62.4%), as compared to our survey’s 60.9% male and 60.9% 41 year old and older respondents. Clackamas County’s 2015 PIT did not break out the race/ethnicity of the chronically homeless, though in Multnomah County’s 2015 count 74% of the unsheltered homeless were White, as compared with 81.25% in our survey. As with the houseless population in the wider region, Native American/Alaskan Natives and Black or African Americans were significantly overrepresented among our respondents. Native American/Alaskan Natives made up 3.9% and Black/African Americans 3.1% of our surveyed houseless people, while according to US Census estimates for 2015, people identifying with these two races each make up only 1.1%, respectively, of the Clackamas County population overall.

Migration and prior residency

Houselessness is on the decline nationally, with most states seeing decreases in every major subpopulation of the houseless from 2014-2015. On the West Coast, however, the numbers are rising, and Oregon has the fastest rate of growth (8.7%) in the numbers of houseless people in the West.¹ Some local commentators have suggested that Oregon, and the Portland region in particular, is a “magnet” for people experiencing houselessness because of, e.g., the moderate climate, the quality of services, or the welcoming attitudes of area residents.² On the contrary, our survey found that the vast majority of the houseless people on the Trail are longtime Oregonians, and it was most commonly reported by our respondents that their last residence was in the community in which they now lived unsheltered. These findings are reflected in the most recent Multnomah County PIT count.

Ninety percent of our respondents said they considered Oregon their home, and 83% had lived in Oregon for ten years or more. In the Multnomah County 2015 PIT count, 71% of respondents had lived in Multnomah for more than 2 years, and only 12% of the unsheltered population were houseless when they moved to the area. Of the 124 respondents who answered the question “where did you live before you began living on the trail,” 95 identified specific geographic locations (as opposed to such answers as “in an apartment,” or “with my mother”). Of these, 87 (91.5%) identified locations in the Portland metro area, while 63 people (66.3%) identified areas near the Trail (Clackamas, SE and East Portland, Gresham). A significantly larger number of people identified as having been housed before living on the trail (48) as opposed to houseless elsewhere (28). Collectively, these data point to an important and unexpected finding from our survey: many of the houseless of the Springwater Corridor Trail were previously long-time residents of the neighborhoods through which the Trail passes.

Duration of houselessness

¹ The National Alliance to End Homelessness, “The State of Homelessness in America 2016,” online at <http://www.endhomelessness.org/library/entry/SOH2016>.

² Anna Griffin, “The ‘Magnet Myth’,” *The Oregonian*, 14 February 2015, online at <http://www.oregonlive.com/portland-homeless/magnet.html>.

The houseless people living along the Trail have generally been houseless for much longer than the broader unsheltered populations of both Clackamas and Multnomah Counties. A large majority of our respondents – 86.72% - had been houseless for a year or more, and 44.5% had been houseless for 4 or more years. In Multnomah County’s 2015 PIT count, only 49% had been houseless for a year or more, and only 10% had been houseless for 5 or more years. Clackamas County’s 2015 PIT count data is less detailed with regard to duration of houselessness, but only 42.3% of the unsheltered people in that count were defined as chronically homeless (that is, having a disabling condition and homeless for a year or more or with at least four episodes of homelessness in the past three years).

Causes of houselessness

Our survey echoed the results of the last Clackamas County PIT count in that housing affordability and unemployment were cited as the top contributing factors to becoming homeless. In our survey, job loss and eviction tied for the most cited factor, with 53 responses for each, while in the Clackamas County count “couldn’t afford rent” and “unemployment” were far and away the most cited factors, with each having more than double the number of responses than the next most frequently cited factor.

Services Accessibility

The Point-In-Time counts do not ask about the level of connection to available services, but our survey did explore this and led to two striking findings. First of all, despite the fact that a large majority of houseless people along the Trail had been without housing for more than a year, 84% had no connection with a services professional helping them get into housing. Secondly, a majority (64%) of respondents indicated an interest in being connected to services yet confessed not knowing how to acquire them – and in many cases that case management services for housing even existed.

Domestic Violence and Gender Disparities

As in the rest of the region, domestic violence is one of the leading causes of houselessness among women. Of those who cited domestic violence as a contributing factor to becoming houseless, over seventy percent were women. On the other hand, most of those who cited job loss as a contributing factor were men. Over two thirds of the women in our survey – 67% – reported having been the victims of violence or harassment while living unsheltered on the Trail, something that less than half of the men had experienced. In Multnomah County’s 2015 count, 45% of houseless women said they had been affected by domestic violence in the previous year.

Policy Implications

Implement systemic outreach services. Several of our findings point to the need for Clackamas County to develop a greater systemic capacity for service outreach and case management. Most of the people in our survey had been houseless for a year or more, were interested in services, and yet did not have a clear sense of how to connect with them. While many respondents identified the Clackamas Service Center and The Father’s Heart church in Oregon City as locations where they could access services, none named the Red Soils campus of Health, Housing, and Human Services. Many of the respondents live in small groups, with some people remaining in their groups while others travel short distances for shopping or work. Given this “street family” type of lifestyle, it is unlikely that every individual in a given group would be able to conveniently travel to a social services office for assessment and services. The

County's Coordinated Housing Access line is a valuable community resource for accessing our housing assistance programs but depends upon access to a telephone, which many of the houseless do not have. Clearly, there is a need to meet the unsheltered where they are, begin to address their barriers to housing, and connect them to available services.

Expand housing options. A related need is an increased capacity to provide emergency, temporary, and transitional shelter or alternative housing to the long-term houseless of the County. There is a severe shortage of affordable housing and housing subsidies in the region, and Clackamas County has one of the lowest rental vacancy rates in the nation. The public and supported housing programs that the County administers or contracts for through partner non-profits are all at capacity, and most have years-long waitlists. For most of our respondents there is no presently available alternative to sleeping outside. The County should explore and develop a range of intermediate shelter options akin to what has been developed in Eugene and Lane County, Oregon, including organized outdoor shelters, temporary rest areas, sleeping pod cluster communities, and tiny house villages.

Emphasize leveraging local community resources. Since most of this population lost their housing in the same neighborhood in which they now live unsheltered, efforts to rehouse them in the same neighborhood should be explored, including via partnerships with neighborhood churches, schools, service providers, etc.

Moreover, the social, environmental, and economic conditions (social determinants of health) that touch the lives of houseless individuals place them at increased risk for poor health outcomes. Coordinated Care Organizations (CCOs) in Oregon are local networks of healthcare services (physical, mental, and dental) designed to provide services to individuals covered by the Oregon Health Plan (Medicaid). Engagement with the two CCOs that provide services in Clackamas County around initiatives specifically geared toward providing services for houseless individuals should also be explored.

Methodology

Survey Creation

We created the survey with the intention of capturing information that could be used by the Oregon Consensus project team to help inform next steps of the jurisdictions in addressing issues related to houseless individuals living along the Trail. We also sought to keep the survey process relatively short (10 minutes or less) and to try to capture the experiences of participants in their own words. To that end, the resulting survey (see Attachment A) included twenty-one (21) items and consisted of multiple choice items, rating scales, and narrative items. The survey was reviewed and vetted by individuals who are direct service providers for houseless individuals and Richard Swift, Director of H3S, prior to its use.

The survey was designed to capture the following elements:

- Gender
- Age
- Race/Ethnicity
- Veteran Status
- Duration of Houselessness
- Factors that Led to Becoming Houseless
- Last Housed (when the individual was last living in a house or apartment)
- Barriers to Becoming Housed
- Employment Status
- Annual Income
- Oregon Residency
- Duration of Living on the Trail
- Location Prior to Living on the Trail
- Factors that Contributed to Deciding to Live along the Trail
- Family Status (number family members living with individual along the Trail)
- Group Status
- Rating of Safety
- Experience of Harassment or Violence
- Housing Assistance
- Waiting List Status
- Current Service Connections

Data Collection

The survey was deployed between June 1, 2016 and June 17, 2016 along the Trail and at the Clackamas Service Center where many houseless individuals go for assistance with food, showers, and additional services. Houseless individuals living at various points along the Trail or visiting the Clackamas Service Center were approached by survey administrators and asked if they would be willing to participate in the survey. Individuals were advised that participation was voluntary and they would not be asked to provide any identifying information. No incentives were provided to individuals as a result of their participation. One of the authors (Vahid Brown) personally administered over 60% of the surveys and

the remaining surveys were deployed by volunteers. Although items on the survey were designed to be read aloud to participants and filled out by the survey administrator, a very small number of the surveys deployed by volunteers were completed directly by participants.

Data Analysis

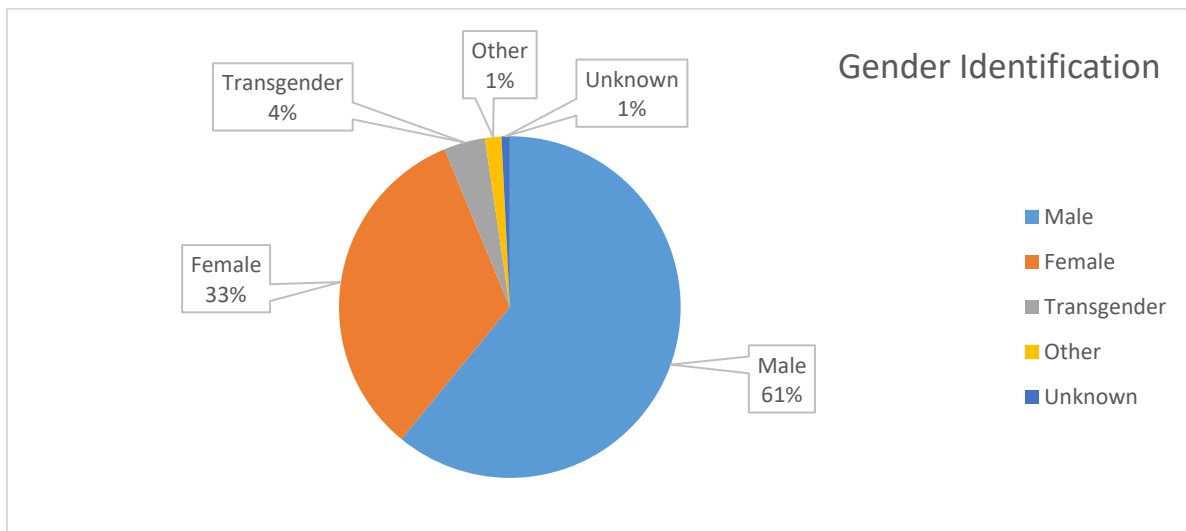
Completed surveys were returned to one of the authors (Erin Schwartz) to complete data entry and begin conducting analyses. Quantitative data were entered into Excel and SPSS for storage and analysis. A document was created comprised of responses to narrative items (qualitative data) which were organized by item number and a grounded theory approach was employed to identify themes directly from the data. Each of the authors reviewed all narrative items, generated themes independently, and then worked together to achieve final consensus.

Results

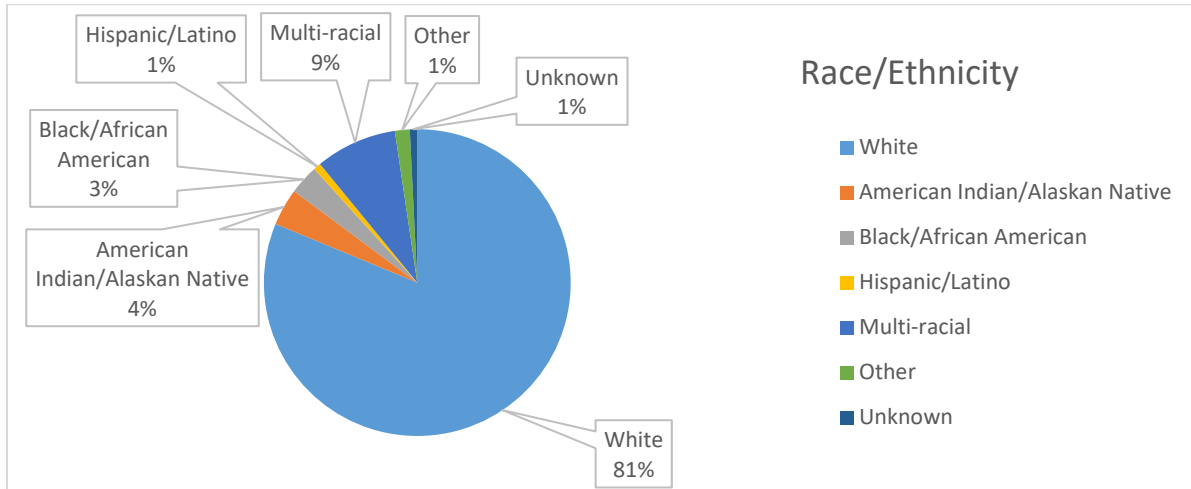
Demographics

A total of 128 houseless individuals living along the Trail were surveyed between June 1, 2016 and June 17, 2016. During this time period it was estimated that between 400 and 500 houseless individuals were living along the Trail. Based on this estimation, we conservatively surveyed approximately 25% of the population.

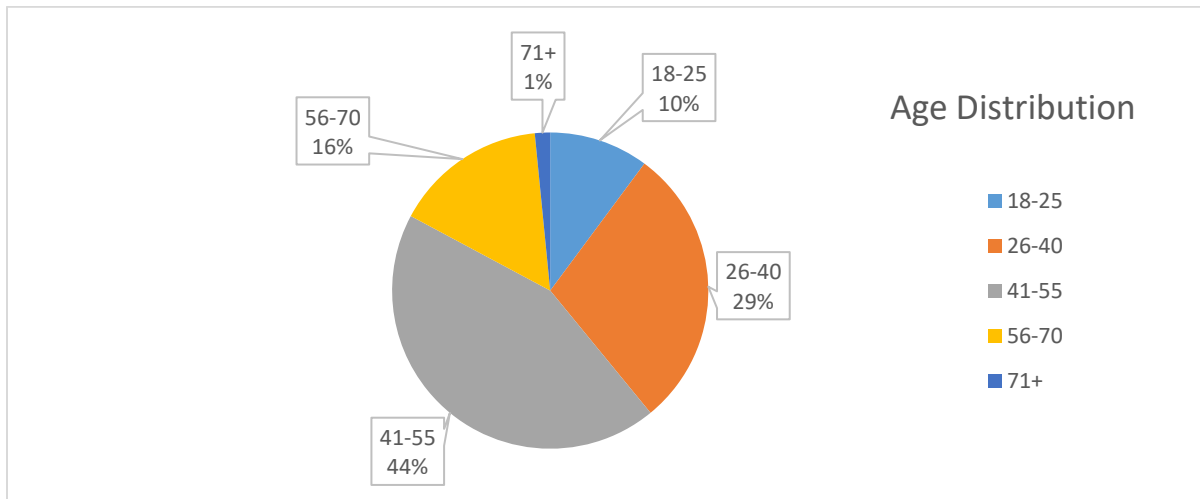
The majority of respondents who completed the survey identified their gender as male (n=78), their race/ethnicity as White (n=104), their ages as 41 years and older (n=78) and their Veteran status as non-Veteran (n=106).



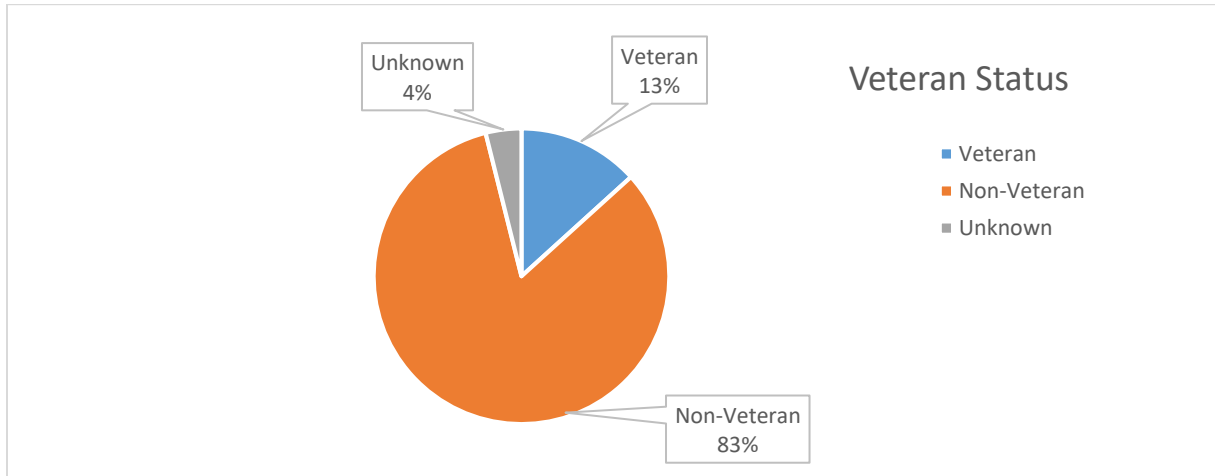
Gender	n
Male	78
Female	42
Transgender	5
Other	2
No Response	1



Race/Ethnicity	n
White	104
American Indian/Alaskan Native	5
Black/African American	4
Hispanic/Latino	1
Multi-racial	11
Other	2
No Response	1

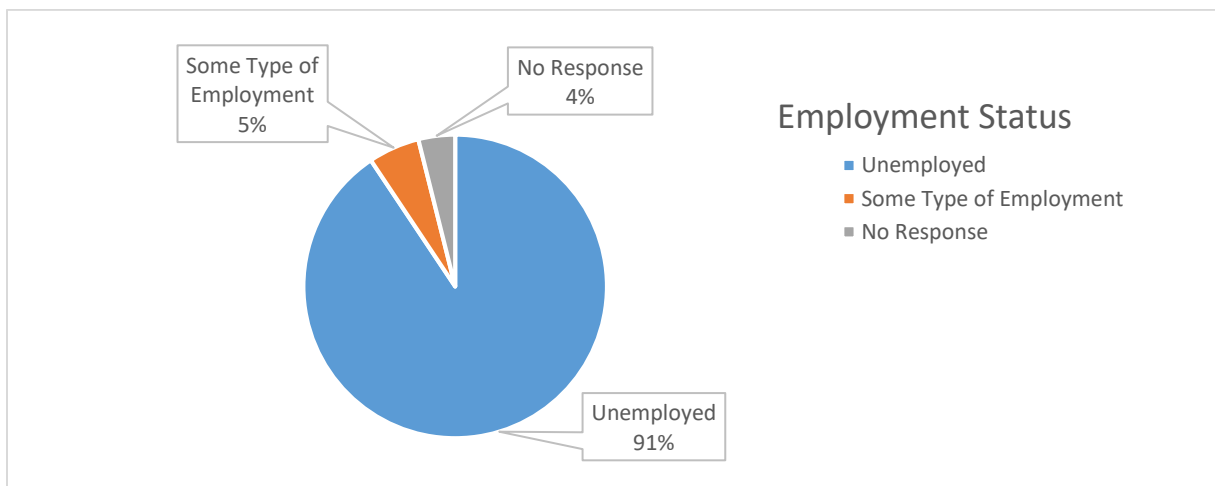


Age Range	n
18-25 years	13
26-40 years	37
41-55 years	56
56-70 years	20
71+ years	2

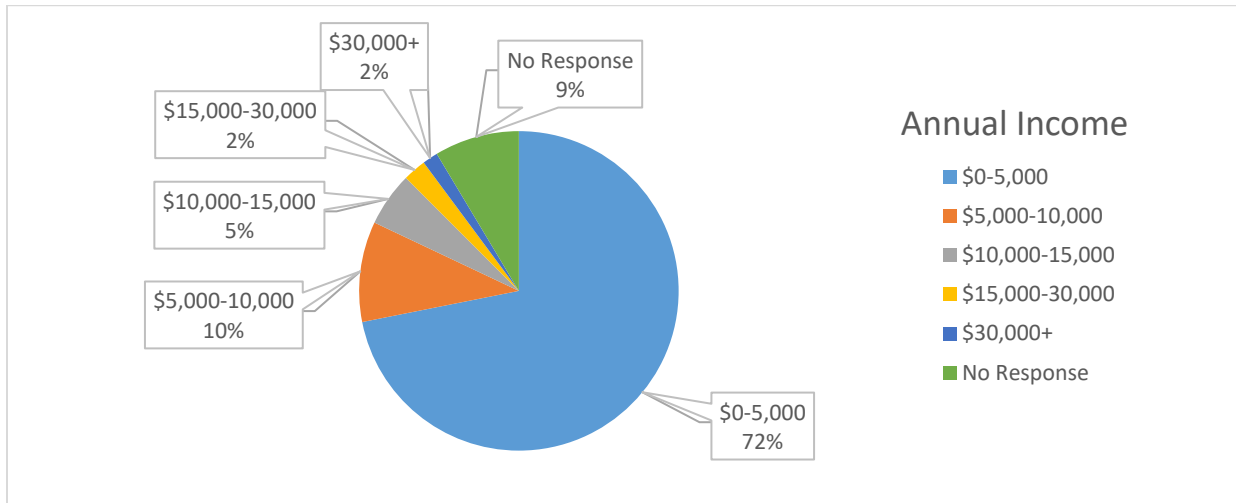


Veteran Status	n
Veteran	17
Non-Veteran	106
No Response	5

An overwhelming majority of individuals surveyed reported being unemployed (n=116) and earning an income between zero and five thousand dollars annually (n=92).



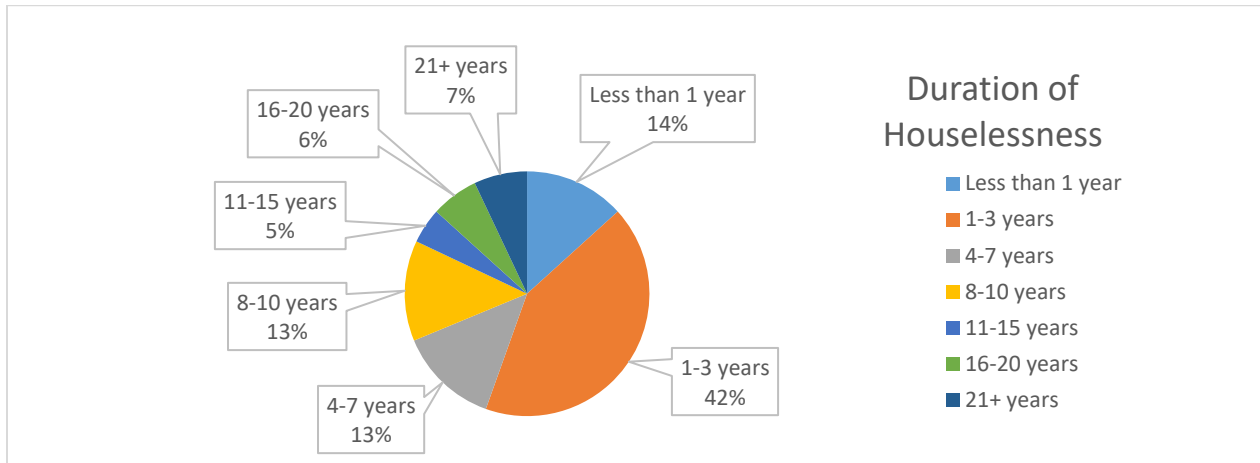
Employment Status	n
Unemployed	116
Some Employment	7
No Response	5



Annual Income	n
\$0 - \$5,000	92
\$5,000 - \$10,000	13
\$10,000 - \$15,000	7
\$15,000 - \$30,000	3
\$30,000+	2
No Response	11

Duration of Houselessness

In terms of duration of houselessness, the survey respondents ranged from 3 days to 34 years. Fourteen percent (14%) indicated that they had been houseless for less than 1 year. The majority of overall survey participants (n=111) met one of the criteria for Housing and Urban Development’s (HUD) definition of chronic homelessness (houseless for 1 year or more). Forty-two percent (42%) reported being houseless between 1 and 3 years, 26% had been houseless between 4 and 10 years, and 18% indicated that they had been houseless for 11 years or more.

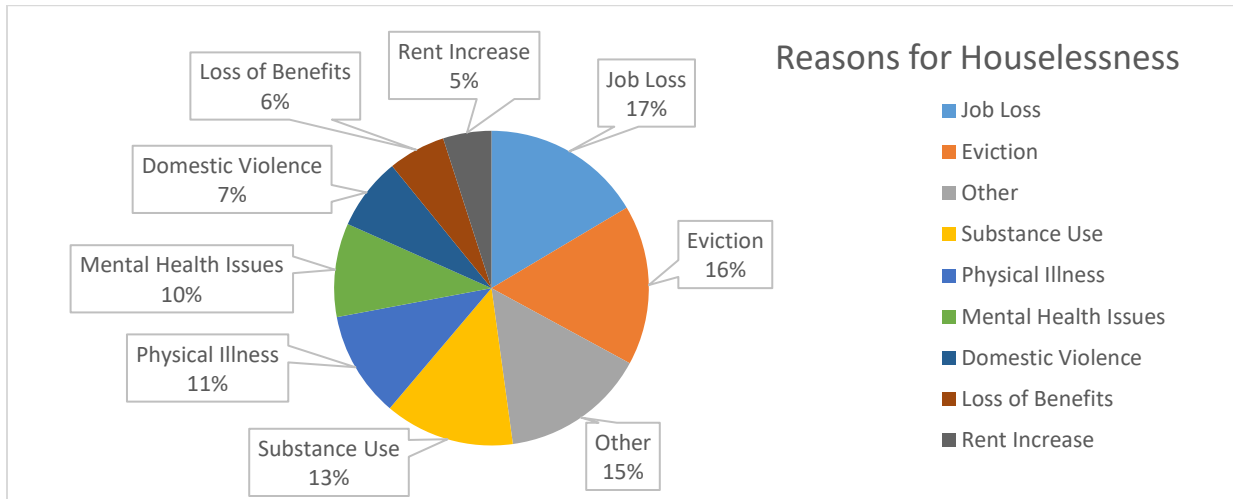


Duration of Houselessness	n
Less than 1 year	17
1-3 years	54
4-7 years	17
8-10 years	17
11-15 years	6
16-20 years	8
21+ years	9

Contributing Factors to Becoming Houseless

Participants were presented with a list of factors that may have contributed to them becoming houseless and were instructed to indicate all that applied to their situation. Job loss (n=53), eviction (n=53), and substance use (n=43) were the three factors most frequently cited by participants as contributing to them becoming houseless. A statistically significant gender difference was found for participants who indicated that domestic violence (DV) contributed to them becoming houseless. Over 70% of participants who reported DV as a contributing factor identified as female.

Survey respondents were also provided with the option of indicating other reasons for becoming houseless that were not include on the list of choices. A total of 48 individuals responded to this item. Narrative responses were documented and analyzed qualitatively for themes. Some responses were complex and were categorized into more than a single theme. Difficulties or disruptions in relationships were the most frequently cited reasons (n=32) and included family or roommate conflict (n=14), being kicked out of the house by family or family moving away (n=8), death of a family member (n=6), and losing custody of minor children (n=4). Logistical or life circumstances such as not having identification documents (ID), losing access to a recreational vehicle (RV) that was being used for house, and/or trying to receive disability benefits were cited as additional factors leading to houselessness (n=10). Additionally, 8 participants indicated that their criminal histories or issues associated with incarceration contributed to them becoming houseless.



Reasons for Becoming Houseless	n
Job Loss	53
Eviction	53
Other (narrative item)	48
Substance Use	43
Physical Illness	35
Mental Health Issues	31
Domestic Violence	24
Loss of Benefits	19
Rent Increase	16

*Respondents could select more than one reason and/or provide a narrative response.

Barriers to Becoming Housed

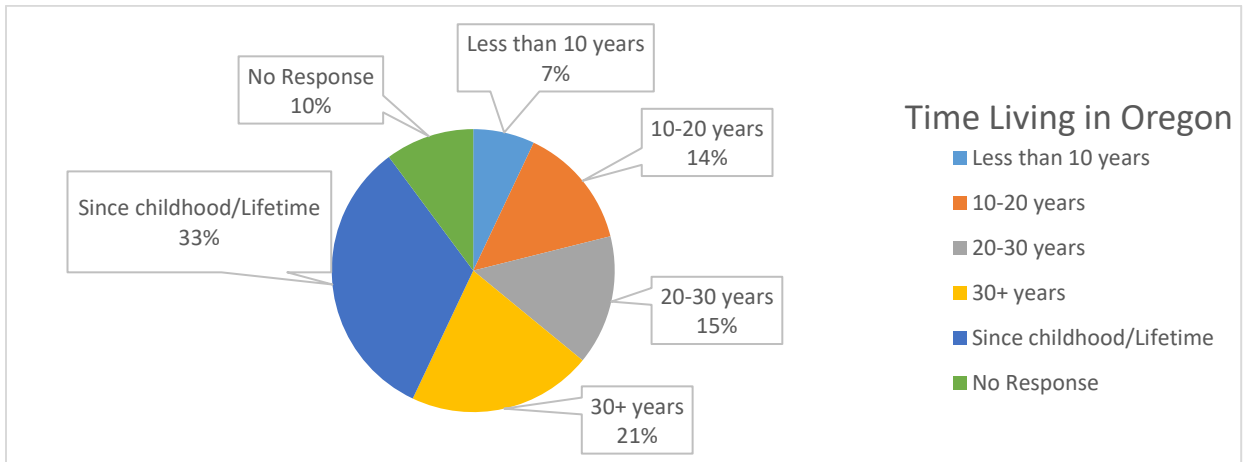
Survey participants were asked an open-ended narrative question about factors they believe are keeping them from moving into more permanent housing. A total of 123 individuals (96%) responded to this item. Overwhelmingly, lack of money or income (n=59) and not being employed (n=27) were most frequently cited as impediments to becoming housed. Twenty-three (23) respondents indicated that not having access to resources such as transportation, social services, or facilities to take showers or wash clothing, was also a barrier to becoming housed. Personal or life circumstances such as history of eviction, health problems, or interpersonal difficulties, were cited by 23 respondents. Additional themes included criminal history (n=13), lack of affordable rental units (n=11), addiction and/or mental health issues (n=10), and having a poor credit history (n=4).

Barriers to Becoming Housed	n
Lack of money/income	59
Being unemployed	27
Lack of access to resources	23

Personal/life circumstances	23
Criminal history	13
Lack of affordable housing	11
Mental health issues	10
Poor credit	4

Oregon Residency

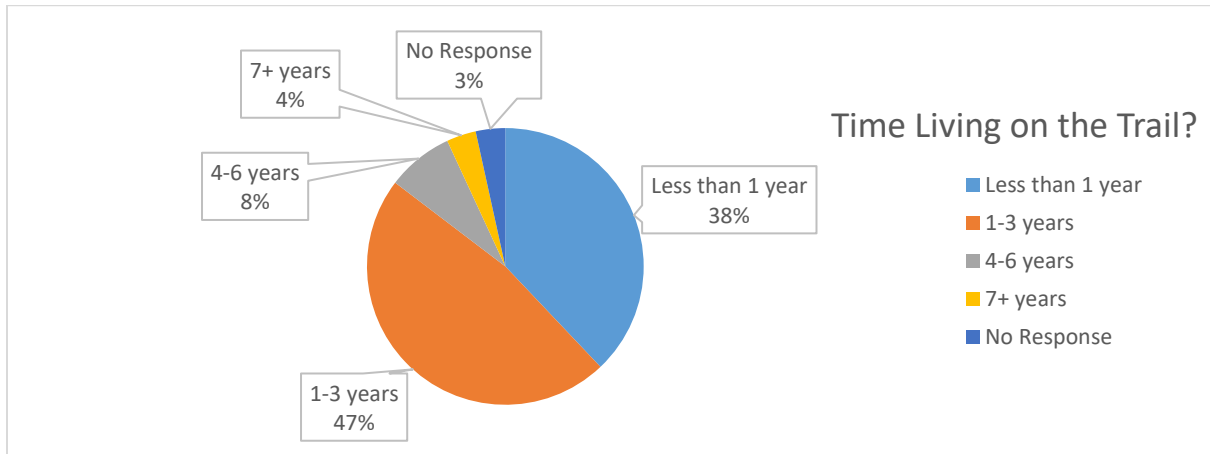
A majority of survey participants indicated that they consider Oregon home (n=115) and have lived in Oregon for ten years or more (n=106).



Time Living in Oregon	n
Less than 10 years	9
10-20 years	18
20-30 years	19
30+ years	27
Since Childhood/Lifetime	42
No Response	13

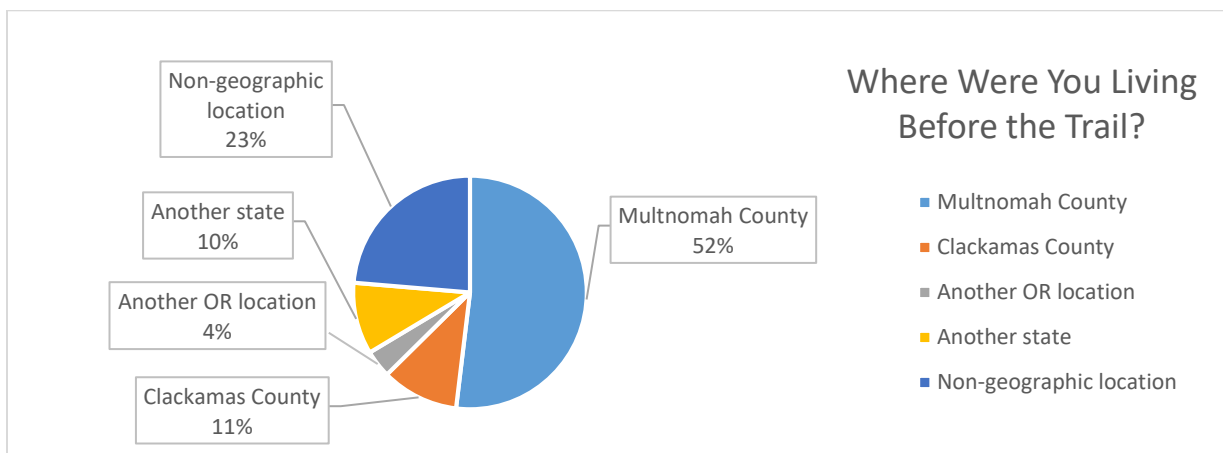
Duration of Time Living on the Trail

Over half of respondents (n=68) indicated that they had been living along the Trail for at least one year and the majority of those reported that they had been living there between one and three years (n=55).



Time Living on the Trail	n
Less than 1 year	44
1-3 years	55
4-6 years	9
7+ years	4
No Response	4

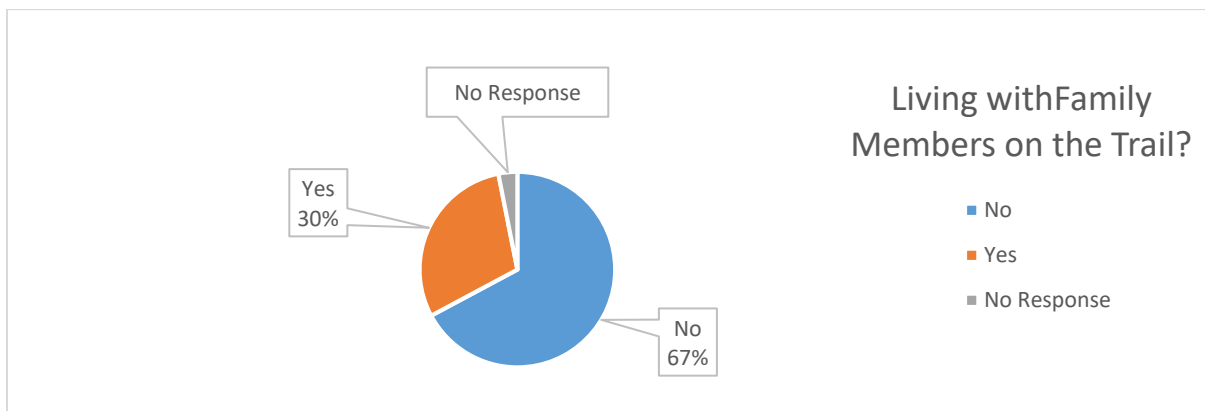
Survey respondents were asked an open-ended question about where they were living prior to coming to live on the Trail. A total of 124 individuals responded to this item with over half (n=68) indicating that they had been living in Multnomah County. Of those who reported living in Multnomah County, 88% (n=60) indicated that they had been living in the Portland area, primarily in East and Southeast Portland neighborhoods that border the Trail. Fourteen (14) individuals reported that they were living in Clackamas County prior to coming to live on the Trail and 5 respondents indicated that they had been living elsewhere in Oregon. Thirteen (13) individuals reported living in a different state prior to being houseless along the Trail and 31 participants gave responses that did not include a geographic location (e.g., couch surfing, in a house, with friends, etc.). In responding to this item, 47 respondents specifically reported that they had been housed prior to being houseless on the Trail.



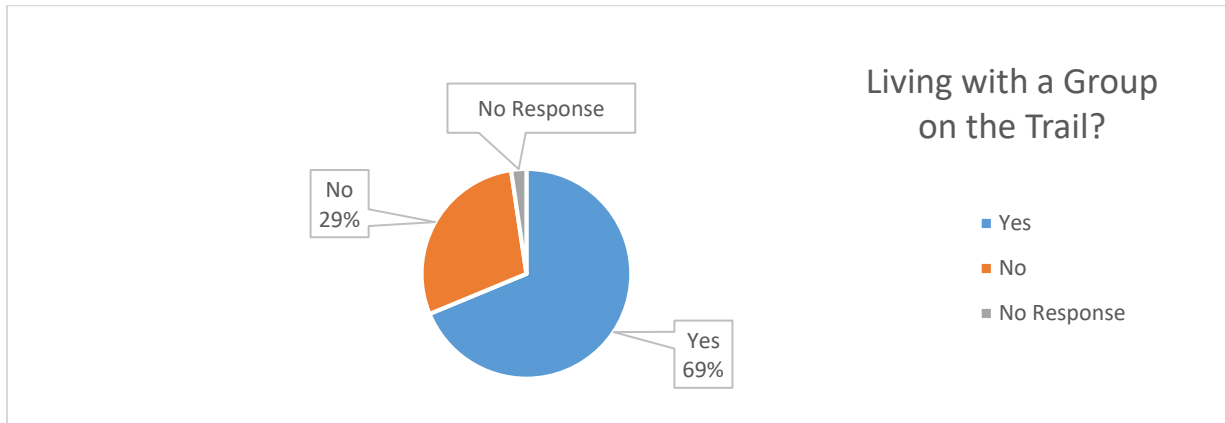
Where Were You Living Before the Trail?	n
Multnomah County	68
Clackamas County	14
Another location in Oregon	5
Another state	13
Non-geographic location	31

Connections with Others on the Trail

Most participants indicated that they were not living with other family members on the Trail (n=86), but were living with a group of other houseless individuals (n=88). Relatedly, when survey participants were asked an open-ended question about the factors that led to them deciding to live on the Trail when they became houseless, the response most frequently reported was that they knew someone who was already living there (n=45). Safety and benefitting from connecting with others were the reasons most frequently reported by participants when asked why they chose to stay with a group of other houseless individuals along the Trail (n=30 and n=28, respectively).



Living with Family Members on Trail	n
Yes	38
No	86
No Response	4

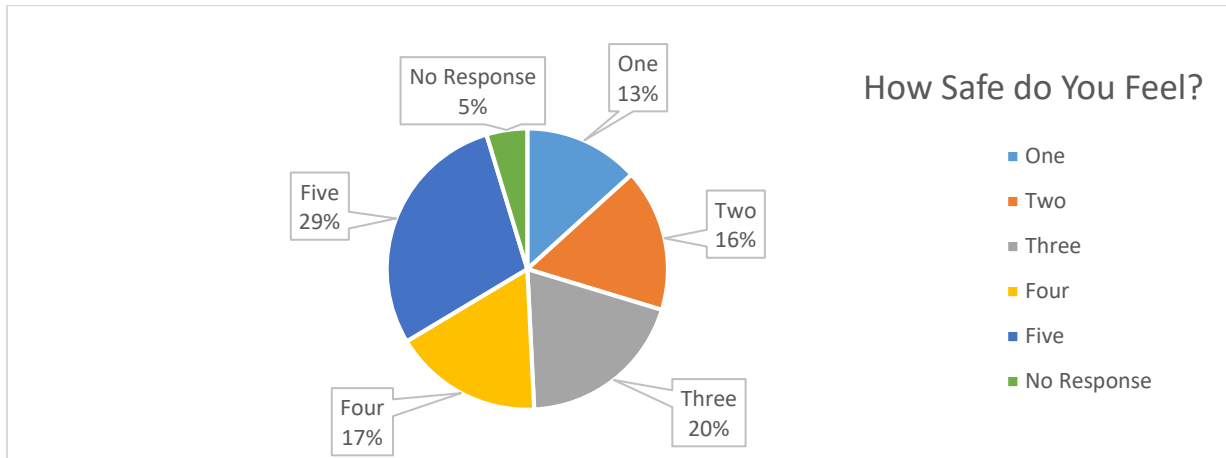


Living with a Group on Trail	n
Yes	88
No	37
No Response	3

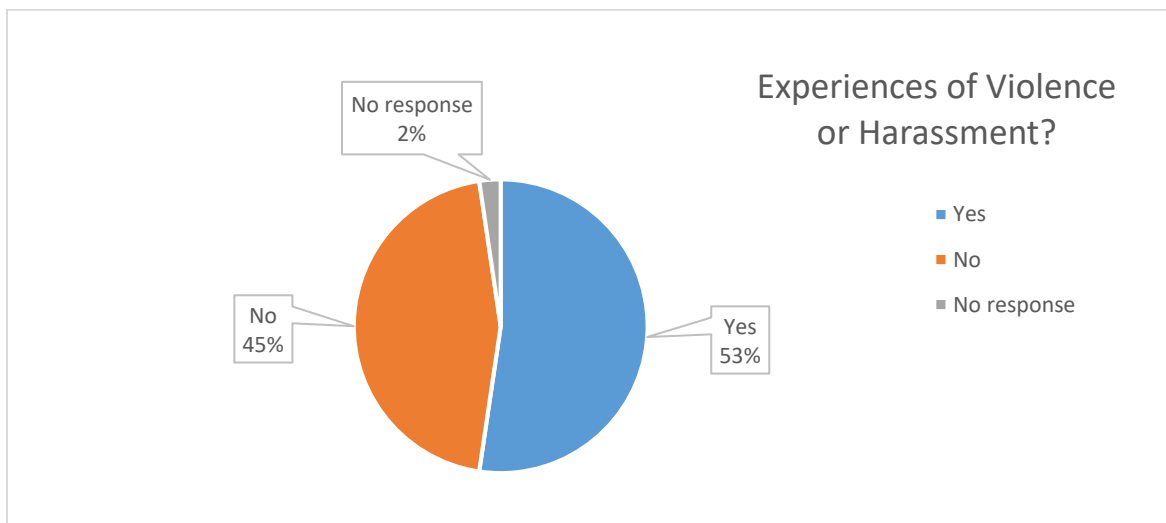
For individuals who chose not to live with a group on the Trail (n=37), the most cited reasons were that they preferred to be alone (n=15) and they had concerns related to personal safety and theft of property (n=11).

Sense of Safety on the Trail

Survey respondents were presented with a five-point Likert scale (1=Not Safe at All to 5=Very Safe) and asked to rate how safe they felt living along the Trail. Forty-six percent of participants rated their sense of safety as a four (n=22) or five (n=37). The overall mean score for respondents on this rating scale was 3.32. Over 50% of respondents (n=67) also indicated that they had experienced some form of violence or harassment while living along the Trail. An open-ended item was included on the survey which asked if participants wanted to provide any additional information related to their experiences of violence or harassment on the Trail. Physical violence (n=36) and harassment/verbal altercations were most frequently reported (n=28). Sexual violence was reported by 13 respondents, 10 of whom identified as female.

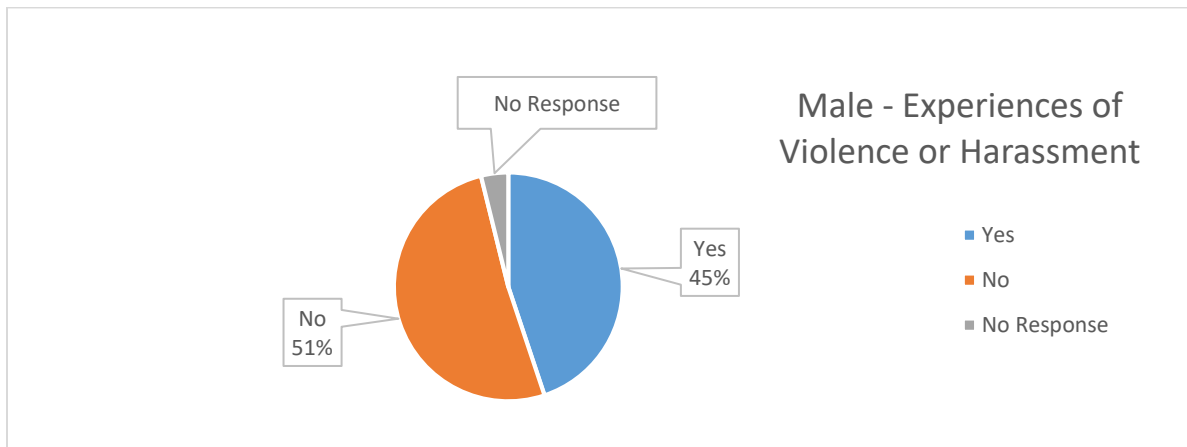


How Safe Do You Feel? (1-5 Rating Scale)	n
One (1)	17
Two (2)	21
Three (3)	25
Four (4)	22
Five (5)	37
No Response	6

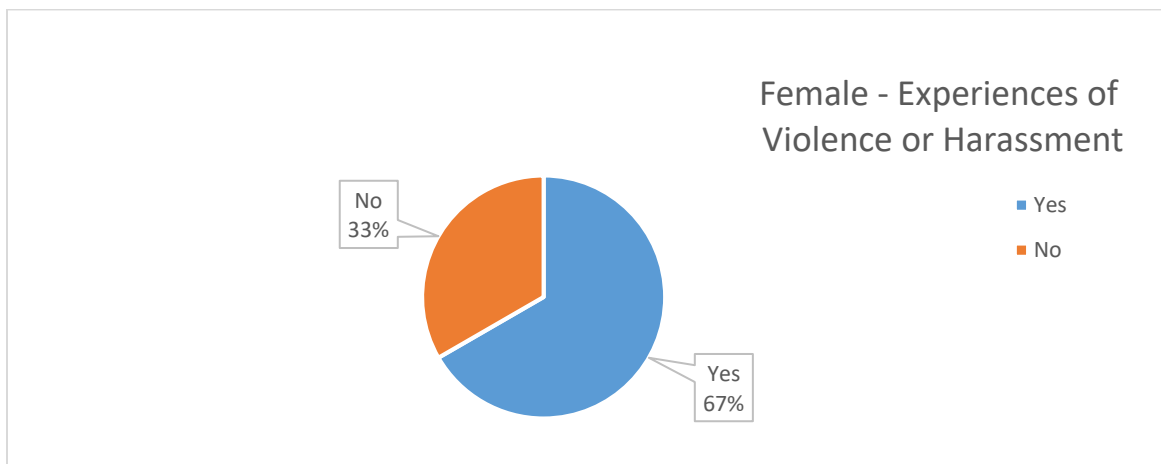


Experiences of Violence or Harassment?	n
Yes	67
No	58
No Response	3

When stratified by gender, there were differences between male and female respondents both in terms of their sense of safety and their experiences with violence or harassment while living on the Trail. Average scores for males in rating their sense of safety resulted in an average score of 3.66 and for female their average score was 2.71, indicating that on average female respondents felt less safe living on the trail than their male counterparts. Sixty-seven percent of female respondents (n=28) and 45% of males (n=35) indicated that they had experienced violence or harassment while living along the Trail.



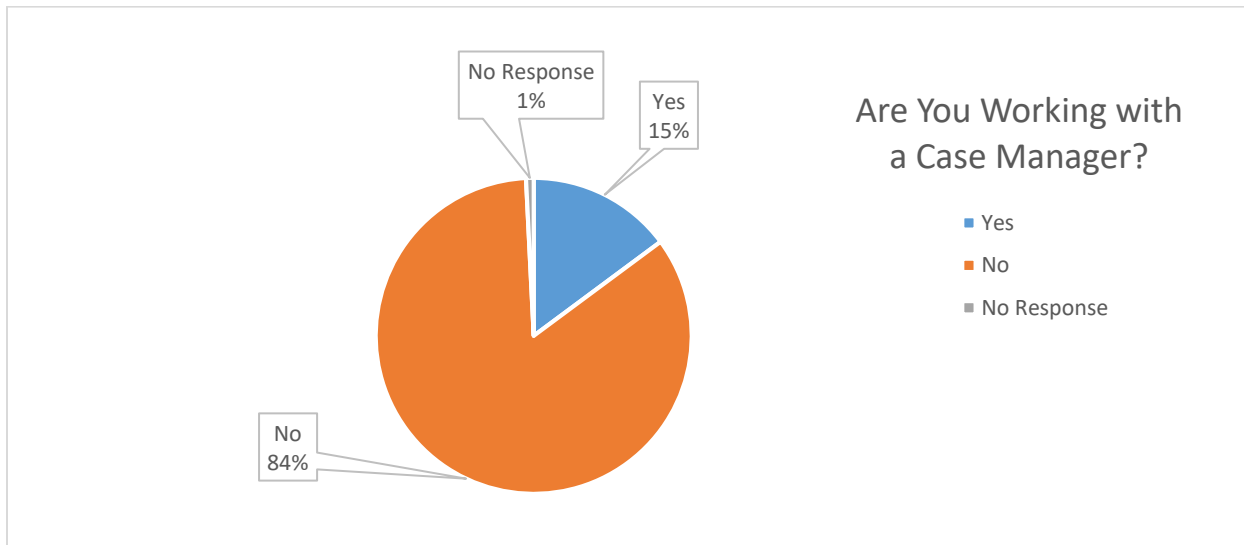
Male – Experiences of Violence or Harassment?	n
Yes	35
No	40
No Response	3



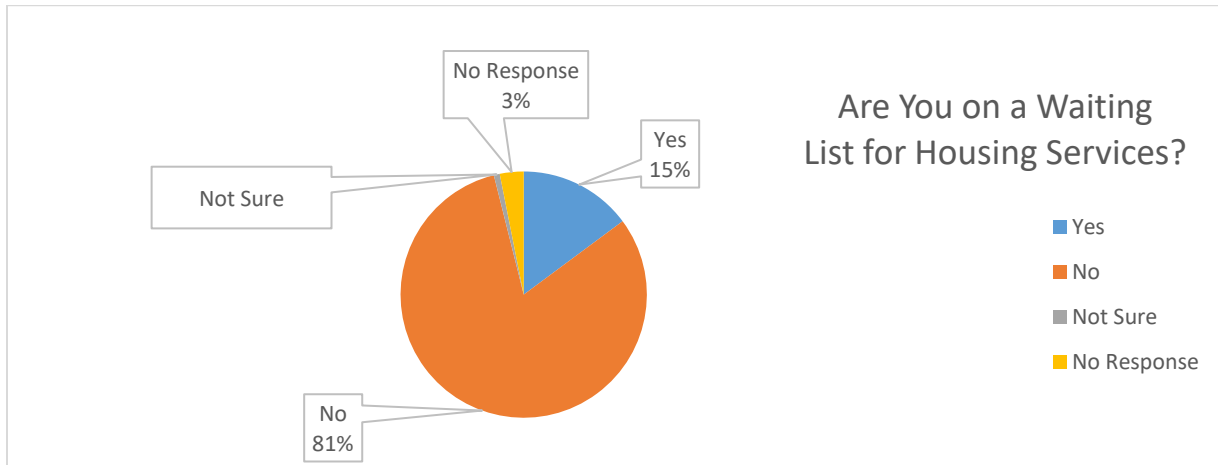
Female–Experiences of Violence or Harassment?	n
Yes	28
No	14

Access to Services

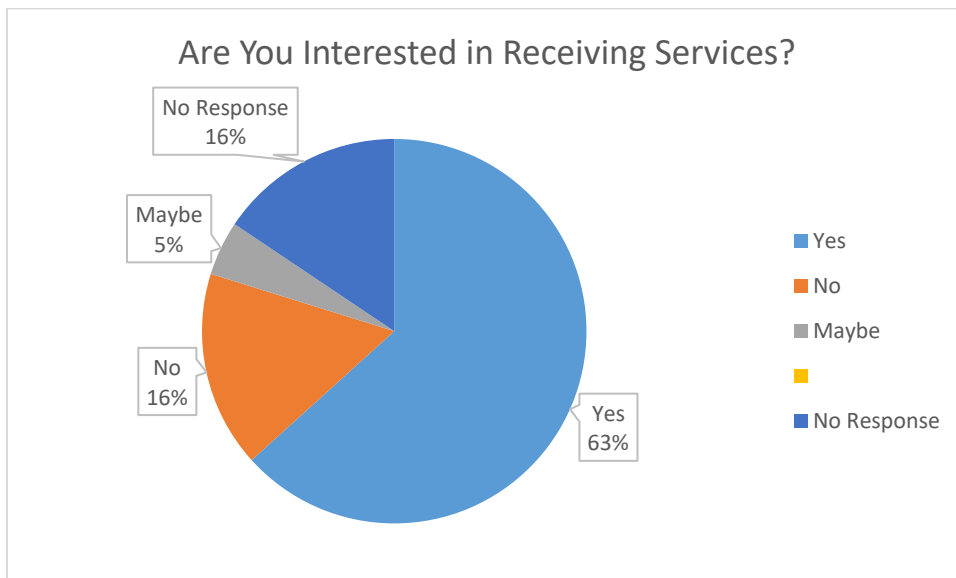
When asked whether they were working with someone, such as a case manager, to help them try to secure housing, 84% (n=108) of respondents indicated that they were not. Similarly, over 81% of participants reported that they were not on a waiting list for housing services. A follow-up item asked participants to indicate reasons why they were not working with a case manager. Most frequently, respondents reported that they were unaware of the services or didn't know how to access them (n=28). For individuals who were not receiving case management services to help with housing, we asked if they were interested in receiving such services. A little over 63% (n=69) of those who did not report that they were working with a case manager (n=109) indicated that they were interested in being connected to case management services. Thirteen (13) participants reported that they had tried connecting with services previously and had not been successful. Another 13 individuals stated that they were not interested or not ready to try to connect with services.



Working with a Case Manager?	n
Yes	19
No	108
No Response	1

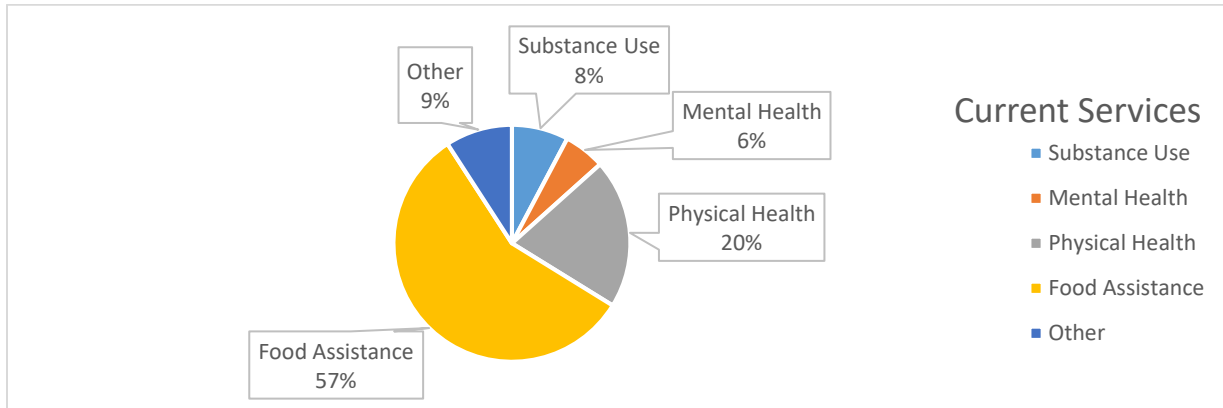


On a Waiting List for Housing Services?	n
Yes	19
No	104
Not Sure	1
No Response	4



Interested in Receiving Services?	n
Yes	69
No	18
Maybe	5
Not Applicable/No Response	36

Participants were asked about the services they were receiving at the time of being surveyed. Assistance with food (i.e., food stamps or food boxes) was cited most frequently by respondents (n=81) and mental health services were reported by the fewest participants (n=8). In addition to the services listed on the survey, some participants also reported receiving or being in the process of receiving disability or Social Security benefits (n=6) and services through community social service agencies (n=5).



*Respondents could select more than one reason and/or provide a narrative response.

Current Services	n
Substance Use	11
Mental Health	8
Physical Health	29
Food Assistance	81
Other	13

Limitations

Although this survey was not created and administered for formal research purposes, care was taken to construct it in a manner consistent with current practices in social science research. As with any social science research that is focused on individuals' unique experiences and perspectives and by necessity involves participant self-report, there are limitations that should be considered in reviewing the resulting data.

Response bias is of particular concern when using surveys to collect data and care has to be taken to avoid including items that are particularly prone to socially desirable responses or creating a situation in which participants respond in a particular way to receive some real or perceived benefit. Our survey consisted primarily of demographic questions and items focused on participants' personal experiences and perspectives related to being houseless, both of which are less susceptible to response bias. Additionally, no incentives were offered or provided to participants who completed the survey.

The generalizability of survey results to the larger population is another potential limitation. At the time the survey was administered, it was estimated that between 400 and 500 houseless individuals were living along the Trail. Based on this estimate, we conservatively surveyed 25.6% of the houseless population living along the Trail. In an effort to increase the likelihood of surveying a sample

representative of the larger population of houseless individuals living along the Trail, those tasked with administering the survey made sure to recruit participants along the entire length of the Trail and at a local service center in Clackamas County located close to the Trail.

There was some inconsistency in the administration of the survey. The survey was designed to be read to participants and responses documented on a paper copy of the survey by survey administrators. A majority of the completed surveys were administered by a single individual and this procedure was followed. Some of the other administrators allowed participants to document their responses themselves on the paper surveys. The self-completed surveys tended to be less complete and in some cases illegible resulting in some loss of data.

Lessons Learned and Next Steps

There were several lessons learned throughout and following the process of surveying houseless individuals who were living along the Trail in June 2016. First and foremost, it is imperative that policymakers utilize a data-driven approach in working to meet the needs of houseless individuals and the communities where they reside. Through analysis of the data we gathered directly from individuals experiencing houselessness we learned information that not only debunked myths (e.g., houseless individuals move to the area from other parts of the country and are high utilizers of free services), but will also help inform future policies designed to address houselessness in local communities. We anticipate that we will continue to systematically collect data from local houseless individuals as outreach efforts and initiatives are implemented.

Second, we found that some items on the survey will need to be refined and new items should be added for future data collection efforts. Of particular concern is the item that asked where participants had been living prior to coming to live on the Trail. We had not anticipated that so many respondents would indicate that they had previously been housed and residing in neighborhoods adjacent to where they were houseless on the Trail. The question did not adequately capture this data. Future iterations of the survey tool will include a modified item that asks specifically whether respondents had been residing in communities close to the location where they are residing as houseless. We also intend to include new items that address whether respondents have Oregon Health Plan (Medicaid) or some other health insurance coverage. The Oregon Health Authority recently submitted a waiver application to the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) which included a request to utilize Medicaid funds to cover housing-related expenses. Additional items may also address the willingness of respondents to utilize emergency shelters or transitional housing programs as alternatives to living unsheltered.

Third, formal training with all survey administrators will need to be conducted to help ensure that there is consistency in the way that the survey is deployed. Because of the very tight timeline to create and administer this survey and analyze the resulting data, training on the administration of the survey was extremely limited. We are currently exploring the option of creating an electronic version of the survey which administrators will be able to access through mobile tablets. We anticipate that this will aid in improving the consistency of survey administration and also streamline the collection of resulting data.

Finally, we will likely need to broaden the geographic scope of future data collection efforts. The city of Portland swept the Trail on September 1, 2016 and the houseless individuals who had been residing there had to move to new locations. Efforts were made to move some individuals into shelters or

temporary housing, but these resources were very limited. Future data collection efforts will need to include detailed location data to determine if there are important differences in terms of the experiences and the needs of houseless individuals based on the geographic location where they are residing.