



2014 POINT IN TIME HOMELESS COUNT

**Heading Home: The Right Thing To Do
10 Year Plan to End Homelessness 2010 - 2020**

**A comprehensive report about the homeless
population in Wood Buffalo**



ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo would like to thank the many volunteers, organizations and service providers who contributed considerable efforts in support of the 2014 Wood Buffalo Point in Time Homeless Count. We would like to acknowledge especially the volunteers and support from the following organizations:

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CHOICES
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Fort McMurray Family Crisis Society
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Pastew Place Detox Centre
The Salvation Army
Stepping Stones
Suncor
Wood Buffalo Housing Development Corporation
Wood Buffalo Wellness Society
YMCA

The Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo would also like to specifically recognize the contributions of the individuals experiencing homelessness whose willingness to participate made this report possible.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

- Table of Figures 4**
- Introduction 5**
 - Wood Buffalo Homeless Counts 5
 - 2014 Wood Buffalo Point In Time Count 6
 - Homelessness Initiative Strategic Committee (HISC)..... 6
- Key Findings 7**
- Glossary 8**
- Methodology 9**
 - Components..... 9
 - Agency and Volunteers Involved..... 10
 - Limitations 10
- Homelessness as a Local, Provincial and National Issue 11**
- Survey Results and Findings 13**
 - Total Population 13
- Demographics..... 19**
 - Gender 19
 - Age..... 24
 - Ethnicity..... 26
- Length of Residency 28**
- Length of Time in Homelessness..... 31**
- Children in Homelessness 33**
- Veterans in Homelessness..... 36**
- Conclusion 39**
- Challenges and Recommendations 40**
- Appendix A - Survey Template..... 41
- Appendix B - Zone Map 42
- Appendix C - Zone List..... 43

TABLE OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Total Number of Individuals by Year 13

Figure 2: Wood Buffalo Population 14

Figure 3: Total Identified Homeless Individuals in 2014..... 15

Figure 4: Distribution within Facilities Count 16

Figure 5: Distribution within Street Count..... 17

Figure 6: Street Count Question 8: Where are you staying tonight? 18

Figure 7: Gender 19

Figure 8: Comparison of Gender over Years 20

Figure 9: Comparison of Gender over Years as a Percentage 20

Figure 10: Gender in the Street Count..... 21

Figure 11: Gender in the Facilities Count 22

Figure 12: Distribution of Gender within Facilities 23

Figure 13: Age..... 24

Figure 14: Comparison of Age over Years..... 25

Figure 15: Ethnicity..... 26

Figure 16: Comparison of Ethnicity by Year 27

Figure 17: How long have you lived in Fort McMurray? 28

Figure 18: How long have you lived in Fort McMurray - Comparison by Years..... 29

Figure 19: How long have you lived in Canada?..... 30

Figure 20: How long have you been homeless most recently?..... 31

Figure 21: How long have you been homeless most recently - Comparison by Years..... 32

Figure 22: Do you have children staying with you tonight? 33

Figure 23: Children in Facilities and Street Count..... 34

Figure 24: Where will you be staying tonight?..... 34

Figure 25: Have you served in the Canadian Forces? 36

Figure 26: Distribution of Veterans..... 37

Figure 27: Veterans Ethnicity by Years..... 37

Figure 28: Veterans Age by Years..... 38

INTRODUCTION

Homelessness is a complex issue and a social problem. More than 235,000 Canadians experience homelessness each year.¹ Ending homelessness has become a nationwide priority. Many Canadian cities have made strong efforts to bring issues of homelessness in their communities to the forefront.

In March 2009, the Province of Alberta released *“A Plan for Alberta, Ending Homelessness in 10 Years”*. This plan emphasizes a Housing First model and a client centred approach that removes pre-conditions to being housed. The Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo (the Municipality) created a community-level plan to address homelessness and create fundamental change in the community. The report *“Heading Home: The Right Thing to Do - 10 Year Plan to End Homelessness 2010 – 2020”* is the Municipality’s framework for ending homelessness in the region.

“Heading Home: The Right Thing to Do” focuses on five major goals to enhance community support and transition to a Housing First model that emphasizes that housing is a right for every person. These goals include: Education; Change Management; Prevention; Re-Housing; and Provision of Supports.

The approach combines housing relocation services and other support services that enable families to break the cycle of homelessness and create long-term housing stability. Helping individuals and families experiencing homelessness access permanent and stable housing provides further opportunity for individuals to seek necessary resources and supports. It also creates opportunities for individuals to engage and participate in society.

WOOD BUFFALO HOMELESS COUNTS

In order to track progress of housing programs and services, the Municipality began conducting survey counts in 2003. They have taken place biannually since 2006. These counts serve to:

- Measure changes in demographics of the local homeless population.
- Track progress and successes made towards ending homelessness by 2020.
- Allow accurate planning and evaluation of programming to best meet the needs of those experiencing homelessness.
- Educate and increase awareness about homelessness within the community.
- Advocate for increased community involvement in implementing effective solutions.

¹ Homeless Hub, Research Matters, Finding Solutions to Homelessness. *The State of Homelessness in Canada 2014*. Stephen Gaetz; Tanya Gulliver; Tim Richter

2014 WOOD BUFFALO POINT IN TIME COUNT

The following report will assess the current homelessness data for 2014 in the Municipality. The research method was a Point in Time (PIT) Count providing a snapshot of information. The report will discuss details and limitations of the methodology. A glossary is provided to clarify and define terms in the report. There will be a further discussion on homelessness as a local, provincial and national issue. Data and analysis of demographics, length of residency and trends of homelessness in the region are included. There is also an analysis of and discussion about youth and Canadian veterans experiencing homelessness. Comparisons are made, when possible, to previous PIT Counts; data comparisons using the 2012 Municipal Census is also used. Following the conclusion, a reflection on challenges and recommendations for future community level counts will be listed.

HOMELESSNESS INITIATIVE STRATEGIC COMMITTEE (HISC)

The Homelessness Initiative Strategic Committee (HISC) is comprised of a group of community leaders and stakeholders who advocate for ending homelessness in the Municipality. HISC is made up of representatives from both levels of government as well as other key stakeholders in the community. HISC takes on the role of stewarding the Community Plan on Homelessness, strategic planning, funding, communication, research and best practices. As part of the strategic planning, this committee also reviews project proposals submitted for funding under the Community Plan to ensure that the identified priorities outlined in the Plan are addressed.

KEY FINDINGS

- 294** Individuals identified themselves as being without permanent residence.
- 10%** Decrease in the Municipality's homeless population since 2012.
- 207** Individuals surveyed in the Street Count.
- 87** Individuals surveyed in the Facilities Count.
- 71%** Identified as male.
- 26%** Identified as female.
- 31 - 54** Majority of individuals were in the age group of 31 - 54 years.
- 42%** Self-identified / observed as Caucasian.
- 37%** Self-identified / observed as Aboriginal / Metis.
- 17** Individuals responded that they had children under the age of 16 staying with them that night. Of those 17, only one was sleeping rough (in a vacant building).
- 11** Individuals have served in the Canadian Forces.

GLOSSARY

Chronic Homeless: Those who have been homeless for a year or more, or have had at least four episodes of homelessness in the past three years.

Couch Surfers: Often transient homeless who rely on temporary, overnight accommodation from friends, family etc. This does not usually involve the individuals having their own space or paying for accommodation.

Emergency Shelter: A facility intended to provide overnight accommodation for homeless individuals. These shelters are usually only available for overnight use and may include access to food and clothing.

Hidden Homeless: Individuals who may be transient homeless who have temporary accommodation for periods of time and thus are not living on the street or accessing facilities or services. This population is therefore not always visible in the community.

HISC: Homeless Initiative Strategic Committee is a group of community leaders and funders who meet monthly to advocate for ending homelessness in the Municipality.

Homeless: An individual without a permanent residence and is thus: sleeping on the street; staying in places not meant for human habitation; moving continuously between temporary housing arrangements; couch surfing; and / or staying overnight in emergency shelters.

Housing First: A housing model that promotes housing rapidly as the first step in moving people out of homelessness. This approach shifts from the commonly used housing readiness approach because there are no pre-conditions to being housed. Housing First involves intensive case management and wrap around support services to help the homeless population achieve sustainable self-sufficiency. Housing First has become a best practice and is used in homelessness programming alongside support services.

Permanent Housing: A safe housing option meant for human habitation; accommodation is being paid for.

Point in Time (PIT) Count: A survey that is conducted in one day or at a particular point in time that provides a snapshot of those who are homeless. It captures population size and basic demographics of those surveyed. It does not provide a complete representation of all those living in homelessness.

Short-Term Housing Facility / Transition Housing: A secure living environment often supported by organizations that also provide emergency services. Short-term housing allows individuals to receive support and assistance in acquiring the skills and means to move toward independent living.

Sleeping Rough: When individuals spend their nights on the streets or in places not meant for human habitation, such as parks, forests and vacant buildings.

Surveyed: Individuals who qualified to participate in the 2014 Wood Buffalo PIT Count survey because they did not have a permanent residence. They gave consent and responded to at least one survey question.

Transient Homeless: An individual who is in and out of homelessness for periods of less than a year.

Treatment Centre: A shelter that provides temporary accommodation and is available specifically to those who require support and treatment for mental health services and/or addictions counselling.

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of the 2014 Wood Buffalo Point in Time (PIT) Homeless Count is to provide a snapshot of the number of individuals without permanent housing on a particular day. They will be referred to in the report as homeless individuals, the homeless population or individuals experiencing homelessness.

The information gathered will be used in conjunction with data from the 7 Cities on Housing & Homelessness. The information will then be part of the development of a provincial baseline count of homelessness across Alberta communities.

The following report represents the data from the Municipality. The 2014 Wood Buffalo PIT Count had two components: Facilities Count and Street Count.

COMPONENTS

The **Facilities Count** was carried out on the night of Tuesday, October 14th 2014. The surveys were conducted at eight facilities in the region:

- MAT program (The Salvation Army).
- Emergency Men's Shelter (The Salvation Army).
- Stepping Stones (Woods Homes).
- Unity House (Fort McMurray Family Crisis Society).
- Second Stage Housing (Fort McMurray Family Crisis Society).
- Marshall House (Wood Buffalo Housing and Development Corporation).
- Pastew Place Detox Centre.
- Mark Amy Treatment Centre (Wood Buffalo Wellness Society).

These facilities include local emergency shelters, short-term housing facilities and treatment centres.

The surveys were also distributed in local corrections and medical facilities. However, there were no individuals in the hospital or in the jail who were qualified to participate in the survey on the night of the count. Therefore, when referring to the Facilities Count within the report, only the surveys from emergency shelters, short-term housing facilities and treatment centres are included.

The data used is based solely on those who gave consent and participated in the surveys. Those who stayed in the facilities but did not give consent or who had another form of permanent housing did not qualify. They were not surveyed nor included in the total number of the 2014 Wood Buffalo PIT Homeless Count.

The **Street Count** was conducted between 8:00am and 6:00pm on Wednesday, October 15th 2014 in 10 geographical zones in the downtown core of Fort McMurray. These zones will be discussed in further detail later in the report. Everyone encountered on the street was approached by a volunteer surveyor and asked if they had already participated in the survey. This was done before proceeding with the questions in order to prevent duplicate counts. Individuals were then asked if they had a permanent residence to return to that night. If they stated that they did not, then the surveyor continued. Consent to participate was given by all respondents.

Survey questions for both the Facilities Count and Street Count were the same except for two questions². In total there were 10 questions, including demographics. Also, as individuals were not required to provide an answer to all of the questions, the data for missing values are recorded as “no response”.

The weather, as documented by Environment Canada on the night of the Facilities Count, was a low of 6.6°C. On the day of the Street Count, there was a high of 7.8°C with sun, clear skies and no precipitation.

AGENCY AND VOLUNTEERS INVOLVED

The time and participation of community and agency volunteers was very important in planning and implementing the 2014 Wood Buffalo PIT Homeless Count. Volunteers from a variety of agencies participated as surveyors in the count.³

LIMITATIONS

A PIT Count provides a brief overview or snapshot of a population at a specific point in time. It captures data on demographics and length of residency etc. However, as the information is only collected at a single point in time, it does not capture variations and changes from day to day and within a given season or year.

Further limitations include accessing those who are not living on public streets, in public facilities or emergency shelters. Such individuals are identified as “hidden homeless”, those who are transient, couch surfing, and in and out of homelessness, and those who were well hidden or in areas outside of the survey zones. This type of count is also limited to resources, such as the number of volunteers and the ability to access multiple locations within the region.

Therefore, although the 2014 Wood Buffalo PIT Homeless Count is carefully tabulated and was executed with care and accuracy, it is important to note that the total number surveyed (294) should be considered the minimum number of homeless individuals in the region.

² Example of the survey questions is in Appendix A at the end of the Report.

³ The participating and supporting organizations are listed in the Acknowledgment page.

HOMELESSNESS AS A LOCAL, PROVINCIAL AND NATIONAL ISSUE

The Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo, established in 1995, forms one of the largest municipalities in North America. Situated 435 kilometres northeast of Edmonton, Fort McMurray is the largest community in the Municipality, which also includes Anzac, Conklin, Draper, Fort Chipewyan, Fort Fitzgerald, Fort MacKay, Gregoire Lake Estates, Janvier, and Saprae Creek Estates. In addition, the Municipality also includes the reserves and traditional lands of five First Nations and seven Metis populations.

The 2012 Municipal Census reported a population of 116,407: 72,944 living in Fort McMurray, 4,192 in the rural areas, and 39,271 in project accommodations (work camps). At that time, 57 per cent of the population identified themselves as being male and 43 per cent female. There were 24.1 per cent who identified themselves as being of a different ethnicity with 75.9 per cent reporting as Caucasian. The second largest ethnic group was Native Aboriginals, 6.8 per cent. The average household income in Fort McMurray is more than \$180,000, with 13.8 per cent of the population reporting an annual income lower than this and 4.9 per cent reporting an annual income of less than \$60,000.⁴

Due to ongoing oil sands projects, people from all over the province, country and world come to Wood Buffalo with the hope of securing well-paid employment. Unfortunately, challenges arise for many people including acquiring necessary skills and education, acknowledging foreign credentials and establishing financial security with higher than anticipated costs of living. This has been compounded by the fact that there is a shortfall between income and affordable housing for many people.⁵

As the designated Community Based Organization (CBO) / Community Entity (CE) the Municipality receives funding from both the Provincial and Federal governments to address homelessness in the region. This funding is allocated to local non-profit agencies that offer supports and services to the homeless population according to the priorities and criteria outlined in the Council approved report, *"Heading Home: The Right Thing to Do - 10 Year Plan to End Homelessness 2010 – 2020"*.

The 2014 Wood Buffalo PIT Homeless Count is a way of acquiring a snapshot of the homeless population in Wood Buffalo. It also helps determine whether there has been any significant change to the data and demographics in the region since the implementation of *"Heading Home: The Right Thing to Do"*.

⁴ Regional Municipality of wood Buffalo, Municipal Census 2012. <http://www.woodbuffalo.ab.ca>

⁵ Regional Municipality of wood Buffalo, Municipal Census 2012. <http://www.woodbuffalo.ab.ca>

Like many other communities, the Municipality has shifted its approach from managing homelessness to ending it by using a Housing First model. Through Housing First, immediate housing with no pre-conditions is emphasized. Services are then based on harm reduction and client specific needs and strengths.

The Municipality has been carrying out PIT Homeless Counts biannually since 2006, which has fed into local and provincial reports and recommendations.

In 2014, a new goal was set to develop a national baseline count of homeless people in Canada. To ensure its success, every community carrying out a homeless count will aim to align survey methods and definitions nationally to allow for aggregate data and comparison. The purpose is to develop a harmonized approach to homeless counts nationally.

Alberta is the first jurisdiction to implement this methodology, leading the way in Canada. The Provincial PIT Homeless Counts are part of a broader initiative led by the 7 Cities on Housing & Homelessness, in collaboration with the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness. The 7 Cities include: Calgary; Edmonton; Grand Prairie; Lethbridge; Medicine Hat; Red Deer; and Wood Buffalo. Though methodologies varied slightly in each city, the 2014 Provincial PIT Homeless Counts made significant strides towards a common methodology and a provincial report that will be comparable and conclusive.

SURVEY RESULTS AND FINDINGS

In this section of the report, there is an overview of survey findings from both the Street Count and Facilities Count. Unless otherwise stated, the data represents the total of those surveyed from both. Also, as respondents were not required to provide an answer to all of the questions, the data for these missing values are recorded as “no response”.

TOTAL POPULATION

There were **294 individuals** who identified themselves as being without permanent residence in the 2014 Wood Buffalo PIT Homeless Count.

This is a **10 per cent decrease** compared to the 2012 Wood Buffalo PIT Count when 326 individuals identified themselves as being without permanent residence.

The 2006 to 2014 total PIT Count results have been included below in Figure 1.

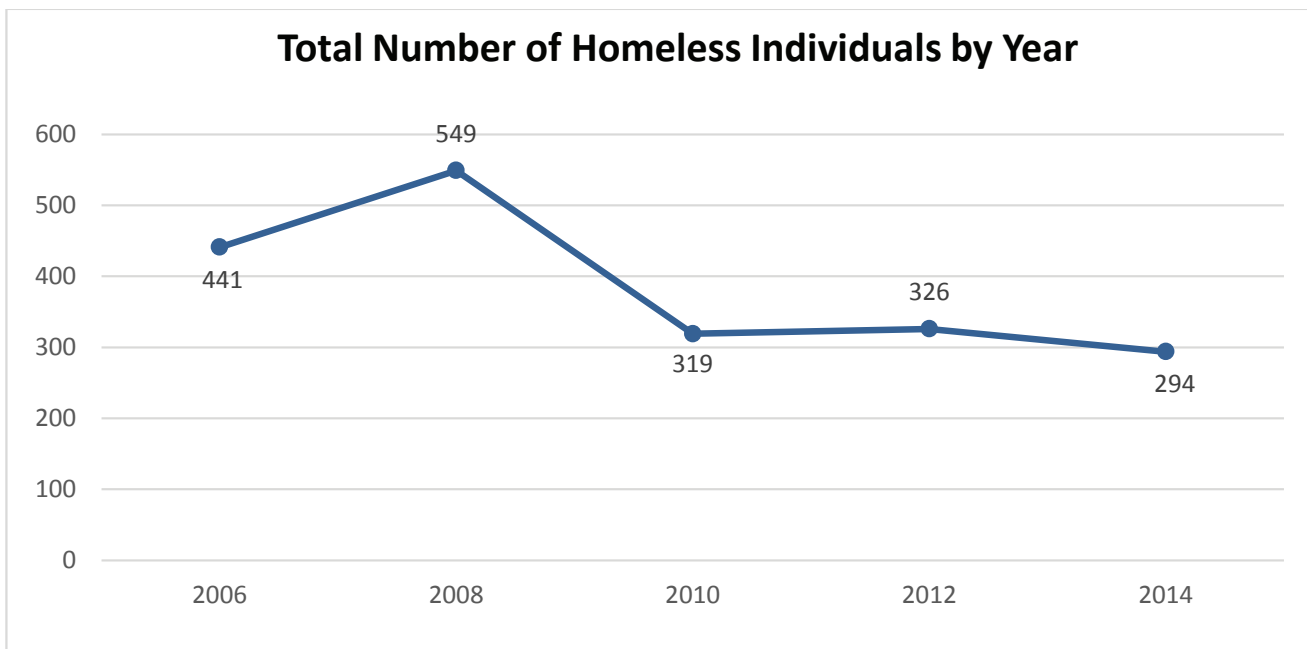


Figure 1

Figure 1 shows a sharp decrease in homeless individuals from 2008. This has plateaued since 2010.

The figure also represents an overall **decrease of 46.4 per cent** in the number of individuals without permanent residence since the 2008 provincial launch of “A Plan for Alberta: Ending Homelessness in 10 Years”.

It is important to note that there has been a decrease in individuals experiencing homelessness although the Municipality's total population has significantly increased.

Figure 2 represents the recorded population of Wood Buffalo from the Municipal Census 2006 to 2012.

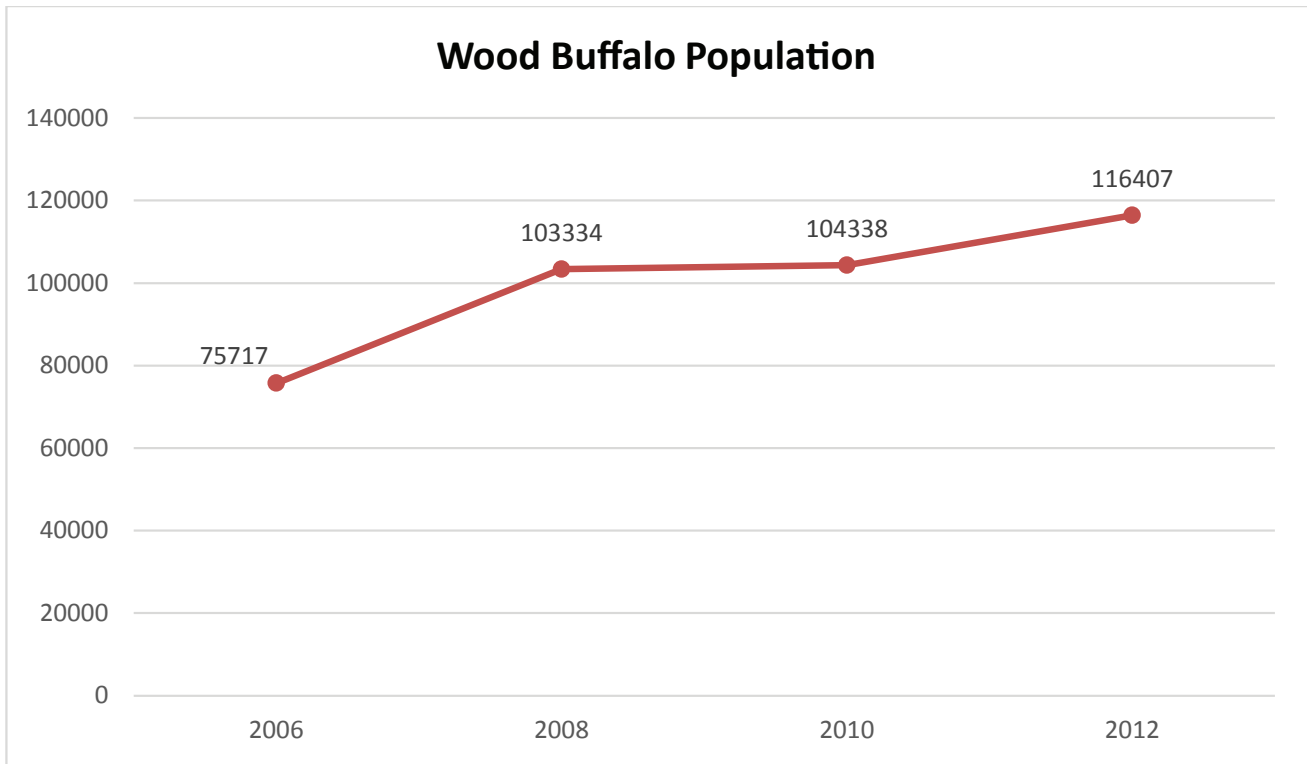


Figure 2

Figure 2 shows that the population of Wood Buffalo has significantly increased and is predicted to grow exponentially.⁶ It is evident that the services available to those experiencing homelessness and the Community Plan to End Homelessness (CPH) have not been severely impacted by the influx of residents to the region. It is important that this trend continues and that, as the general population grows, the homeless population does not.

Often, challenges arise for new residents including acquiring necessary skills and education, acknowledging foreign credentials and establishing financial security and affordable housing options. All of these can lead to vulnerable situations for individuals and families, and acknowledging these challenges is paramount for the success of the community and the continued decrease of the homeless population.

⁶ Regional Municipality of wood Buffalo, Municipal Census 2012. <http://www.woodbuffalo.ab.ca>

Figure 3 represents the distribution of individuals surveyed between the Street Count and Facilities Count.

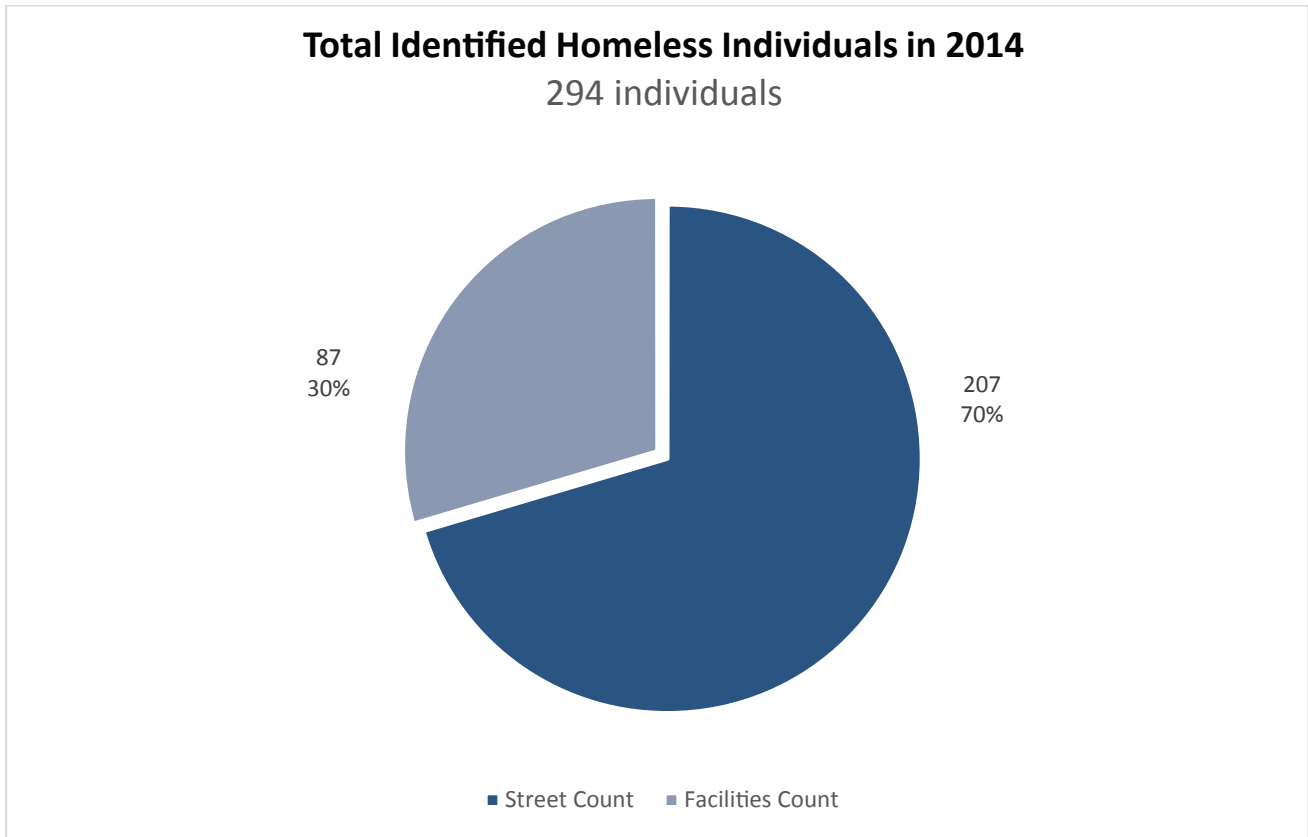


Figure 3

As Figure 3 shows, 70 per cent of those who participated in the 2014 Wood Buffalo PIT Homeless Count were surveyed on the street and 30 per cent were surveyed in facilities.

Figure 4 shows the distribution of those surveyed in the Facilities Count.

A total of 87 individuals were surveyed in the Facilities Count. It is important to note that Corrections and Health Services were asked to conduct surveys as part of the 2014 Wood Buffalo PIT Homeless Count. However, there were not any individuals who qualified to participate on the designated day. Therefore, the Facilities Count includes only emergency shelters, short-term housing facilities and treatment centres.

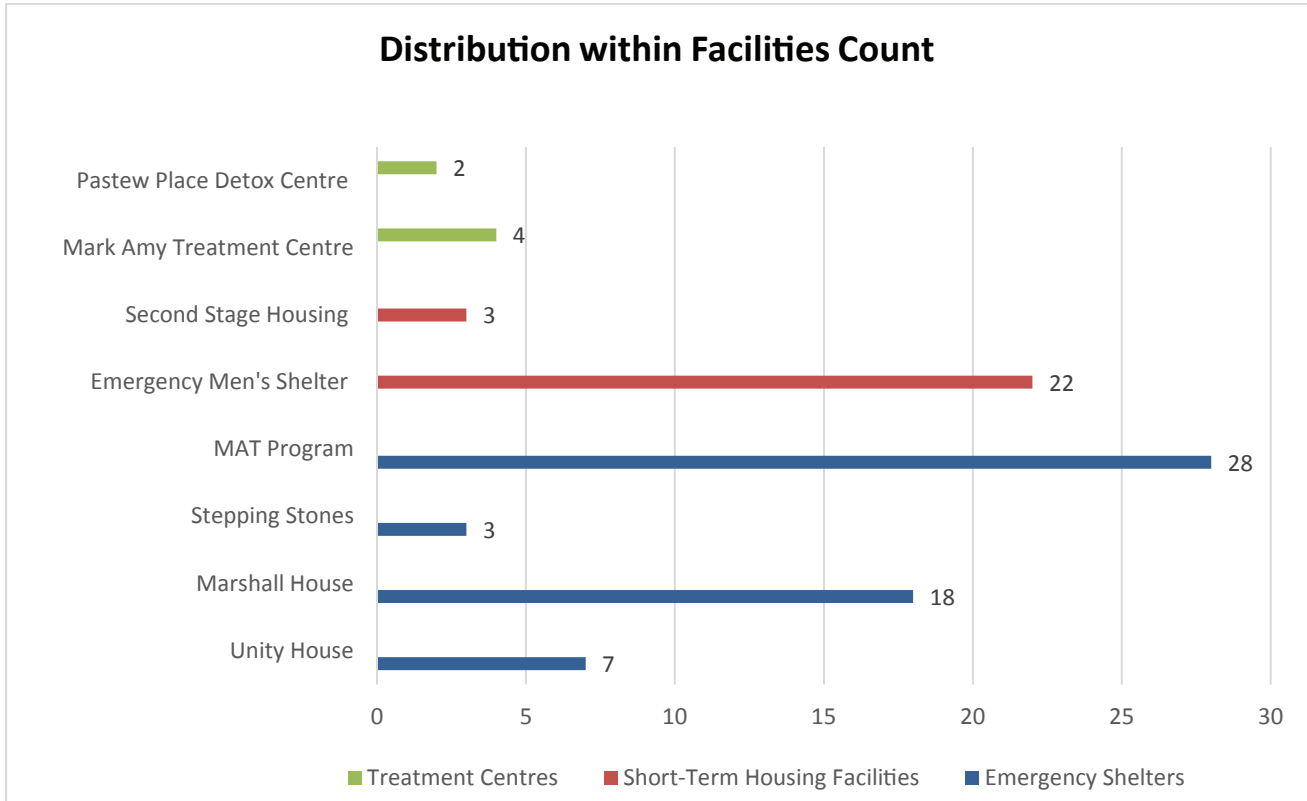


Figure 4

Figure 4 shows the total number of participants surveyed at each facility. Those surveyed at the emergency shelters represent 64 per cent of those in the Facilities Count. The remaining 36 per cent were surveyed in short-term housing facilities and treatment centres. As indicated, most were surveyed at the MAT program, Emergency Men's Shelter and Marshall House.

Both Marshall House and The Salvation Army MAT program are emergency shelters open overnight. The Salvation Army Emergency Men's Shelter is a short-term housing facility; those who stay are part of a 21-day stay program working towards a permanent housing option. These individuals are employed and often pay a small fee for rent, subject to their income.

Figure 5 shows the distribution of individuals surveyed in the Street Count.

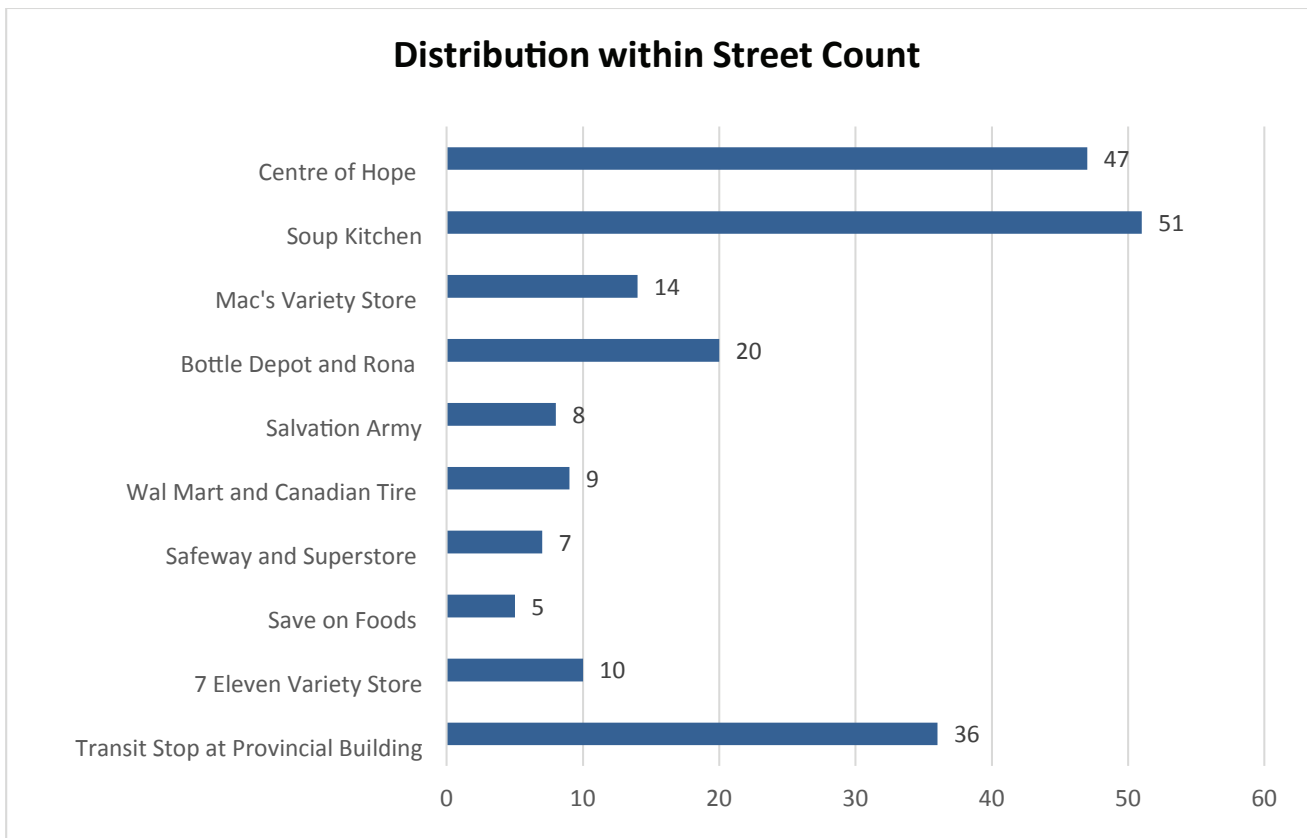


Figure 5

Figure 5 shows the number of individuals surveyed at each location on the street.⁷ The greatest number of individuals surveyed were at the transit stop outside of the Provincial Building, the Soup Kitchen and outside of the Centre of Hope. This represents 65 per cent of those surveyed on the street.

It is important to note that the Centre of Hope is a daytime only drop-in shelter that was not included in the Facilities Count. Also, the Soup Kitchen provides free meals for lunch. The Centre of Hope is a two-minute walk from the Soup Kitchen. Therefore, it is clear why a higher percentage of individuals may have been surveyed at these locations.

The results are interesting as they show the distribution of individuals geographically within the downtown core during the 2014 Wood Buffalo PIT Homeless Count. However, it is also valuable to identify where these individuals planned to stay overnight.

⁷ The geographical zone map may be found at the end of the report in Appendices B and C.

Figure 6 shows where the individuals surveyed in the Street Count planned to stay overnight.

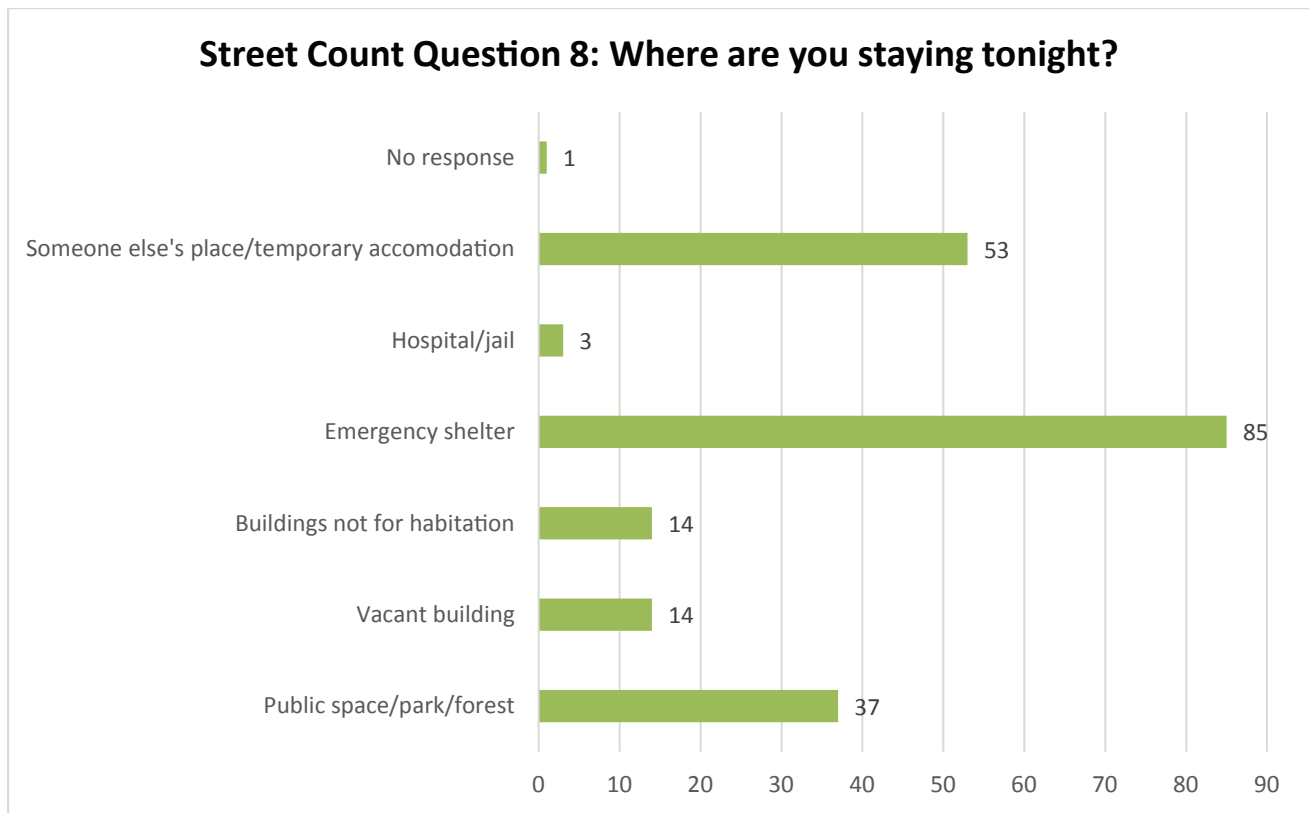


Figure 6

Figure 6 shows that of the 207 individuals surveyed in the Street Count, 85 (41 per cent) said that they were planning to stay in an emergency shelter that night. This represents a significant number of the homeless population that rely on emergency shelter services.

There were 53 individuals (26 per cent) that planned to stay at someone else's place and / or in temporary accommodation, including hotels and motels. This represents a brief snapshot of those who may be classified as transient homeless, couch surfers and hidden homeless. Other individuals who did not have permanent housing and who are vulnerable to falling in and out of homelessness may not have been captured on the day of the 2014 Wood Buffalo PIT Homeless Count, remaining "hidden".

DEMOGRAPHICS

This section provides an overview of the survey findings from both the Street Count and Facilities Count. Unless otherwise stated, the data represents the total of those surveyed from both. Also, as respondents were not required to provide an answer to all of the questions, the data for these missing values are recorded as “no response”.

The demographic data includes gender, age and ethnicity.

GENDER

The following figures represent the total housing needs by gender in the 2014 Wood Buffalo PIT Homeless Count.

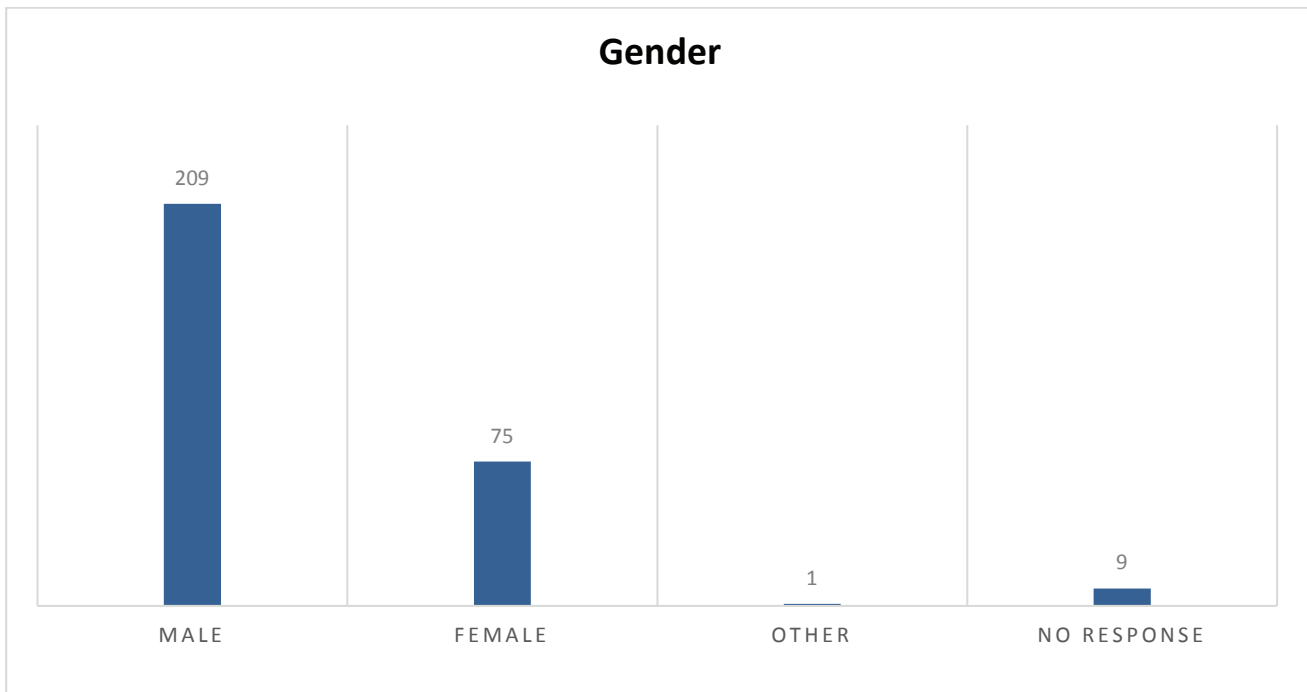


Figure 7

There were 209 males (71 per cent) in the total homeless population. There has been no change since the 2012 Wood Buffalo PIT Homeless Count.

There were 75 females (26 per cent) in the total homeless population, down from the 2012 Wood Buffalo PIT Homeless Count.

Figure 8 compares gender between 2010, 2012 and 2014.

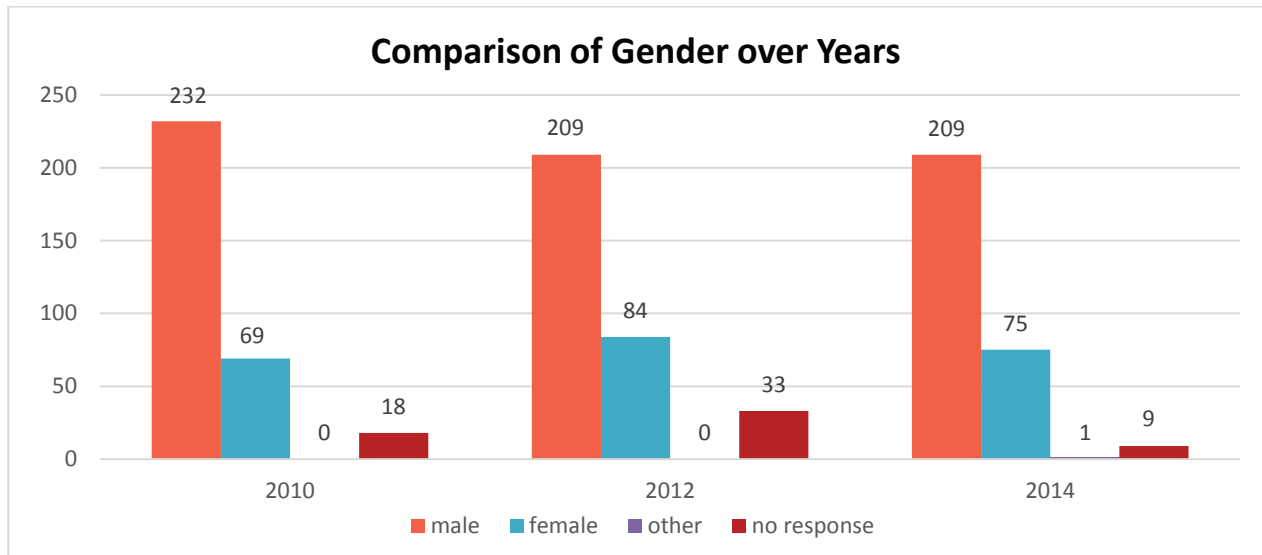


Figure 8

Figure 8 shows a slight decline in females since 2012.

It is important to note that when comparing percentages of male and females relative to the total number of individuals surveyed at each PIT Count, it is clear that though the number of males is the same, the percentage of the total has increased from 64 per cent to 71 per cent between 2012 and 2014.

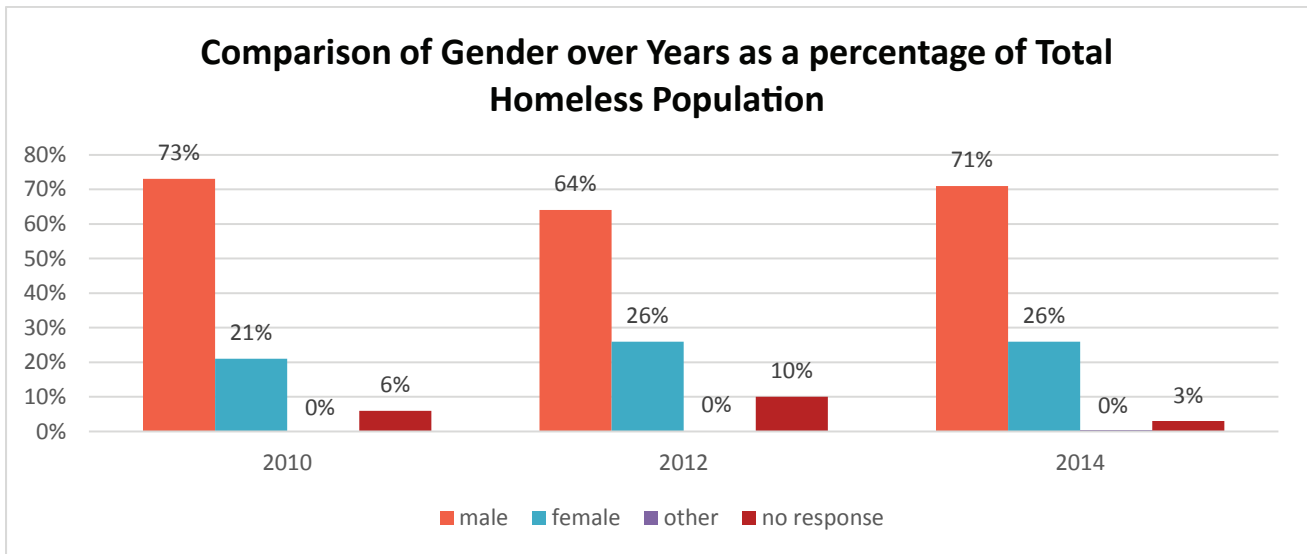


Figure 9

Figure 9 shows that the percentage of males surveyed has increased since 2012. Previous data shows that there were 73 per cent males in 2010, 64 per cent in 2012 and 71 per cent in 2014. The percentage of females has remained relatively stable between 2010 and 2014 with 21 per cent in 2010, 26 per cent in 2012 and 26 per cent in 2014.

The percentage of individuals identifying themselves in the category of "other" is less than 0.5 per cent in the 2014 Wood Buffalo PIT Homeless Count. However, this option was not given in previous PIT Counts, so there is no data for comparison.

Also, the percentage of those who did not provide a response to the question of gender has decreased. The reason for this decrease is unclear.

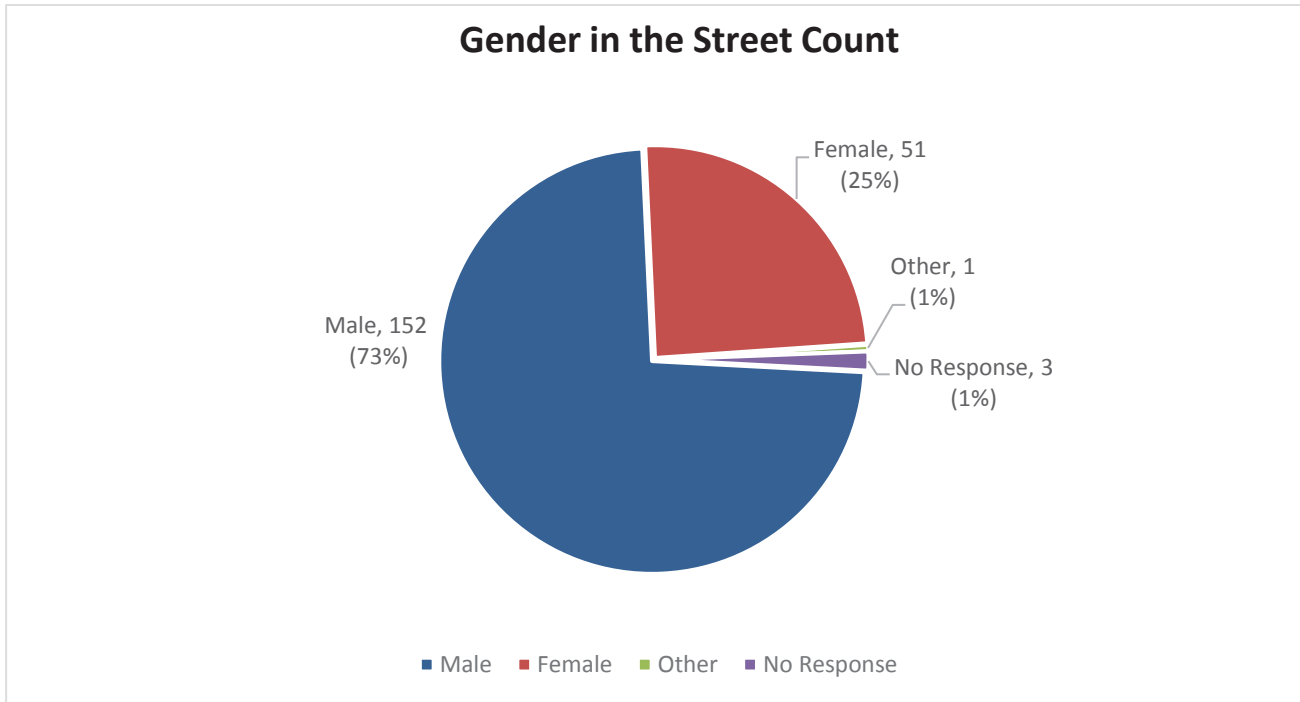


Figure 10

Figure 10 shows that of the 207 individuals surveyed in the Street Count, 73 per cent were male and 25 per cent were female.

Figure 11 shows gender distribution in the Facilities Count.

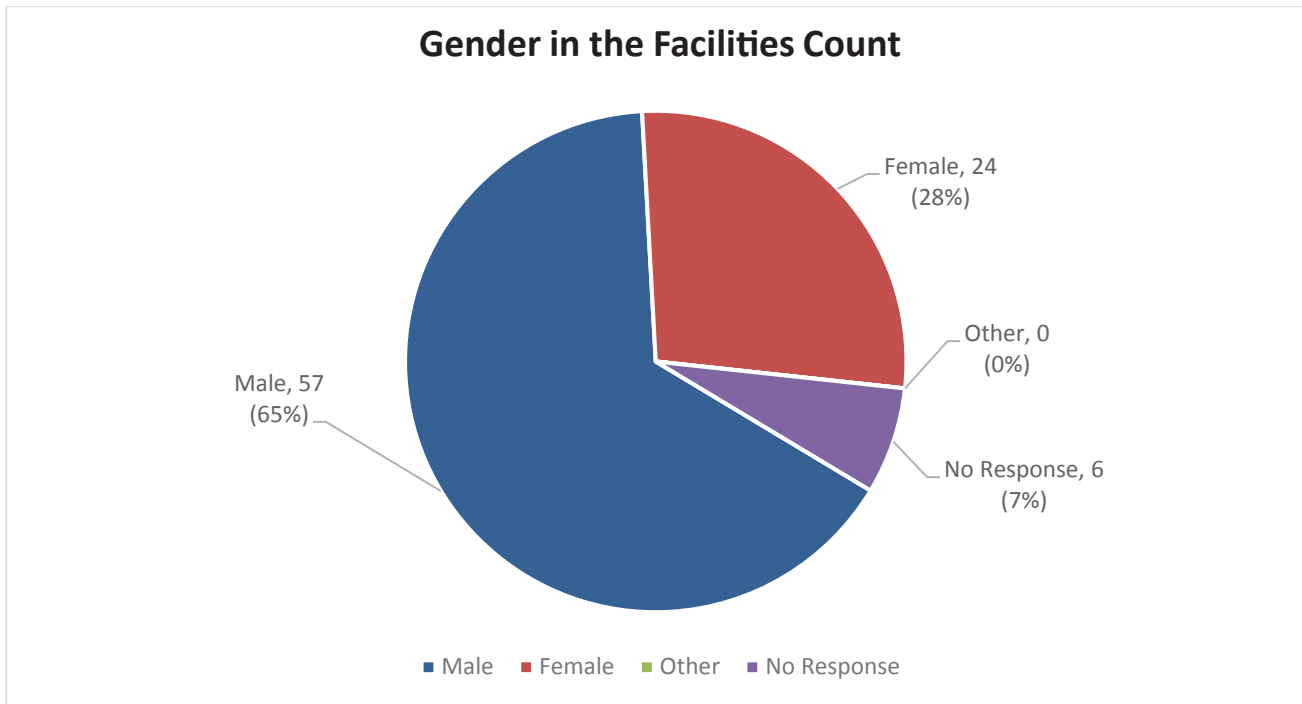


Figure 11

Figure 11 shows that, overall, 65 per cent of the 87 individuals surveyed in the Facilities Count were male.

A larger percentage of women were surveyed in the Facilities Count (28 per cent) compared to the Street Count (25 per cent).

It is interesting to note that the majority of "no responses" (missing data) was recorded in the Facilities Count.

Figure 12 shows gender distribution within each facility in the Facilities Count.

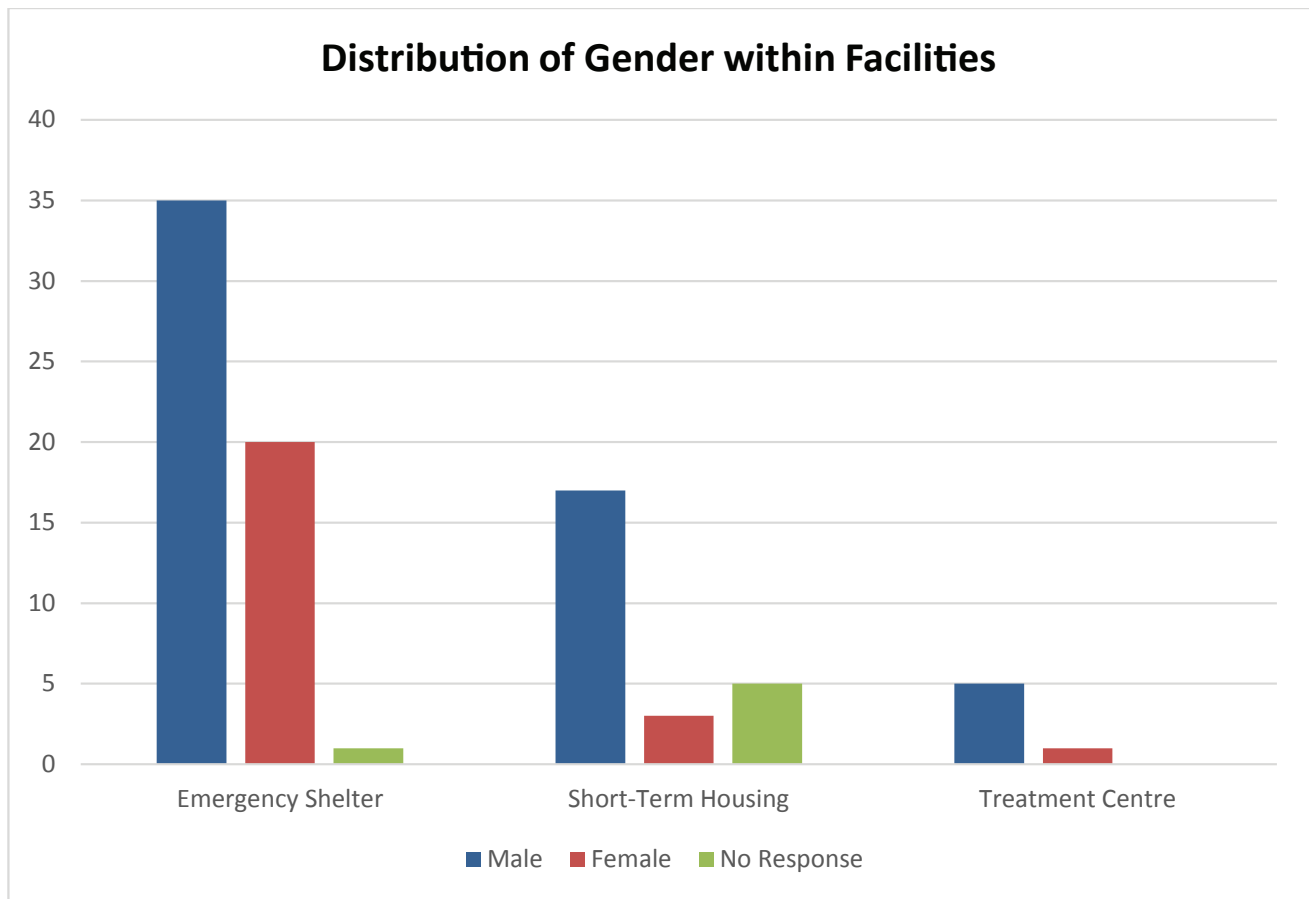


Figure 12

Figure 12 shows that 35 individuals (63 per cent) in emergency shelters were male, 17 individuals (68 per cent) in short-term housing facilities were male, and 5 individuals (83 per cent) in treatment centres were male. The largest number of female individuals were in emergency shelters.

It is important to note that some of the facilities are gender-specific, especially the emergency shelters.

AGE

Figure 13 gives an age breakdown of the total surveyed in the 2014 Wood Buffalo PIT Homeless Count.

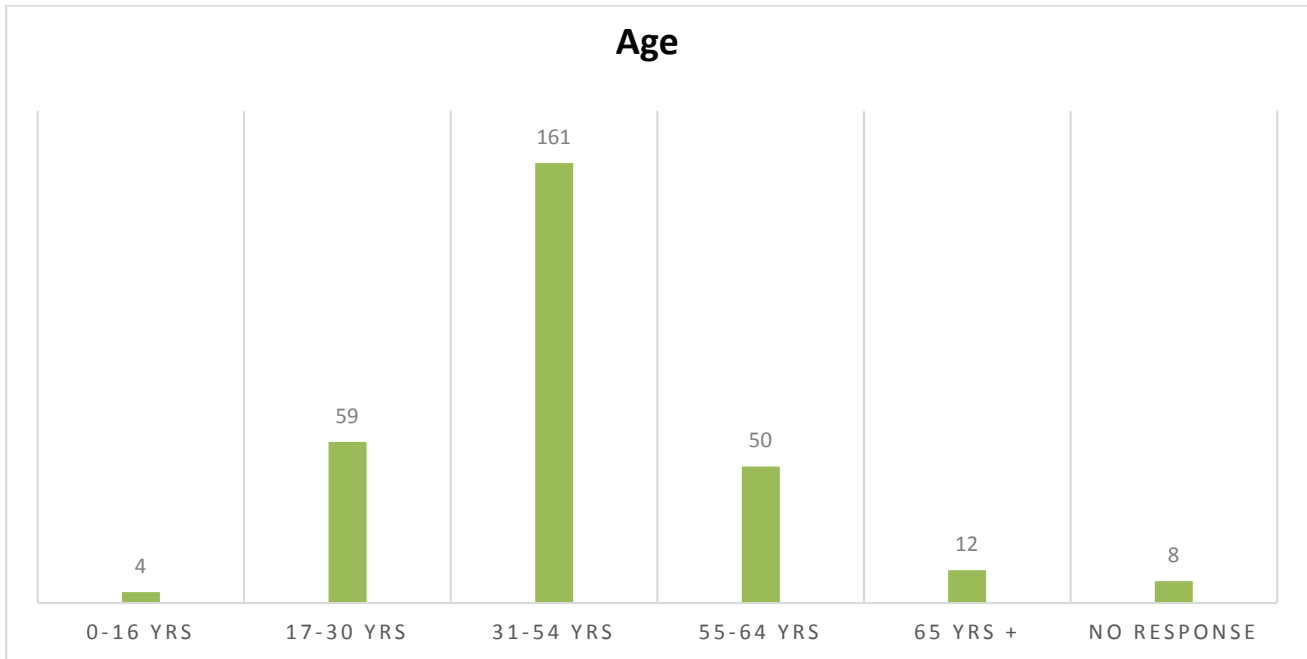


Figure 13

There were four people (1 per cent) of the total surveyed who identified themselves as 16 years of age or under. Of those, three were staying in an emergency shelter for youth.⁸

There were 59 people (20 per cent) of the total surveyed who identified themselves in the 17-30 years age range.

There were 161 people (55 per cent) of the total surveyed who identified themselves in the 31-54 age range.

There were 50 people (17 per cent) of all individuals surveyed who identified themselves as being in the 55-64 years age range.

There were 12 people (4 per cent) of the total surveyed who identified themselves as being 65 years or older.

⁸ Refer to page 33, the section on Children in Homelessness for further data analysis.

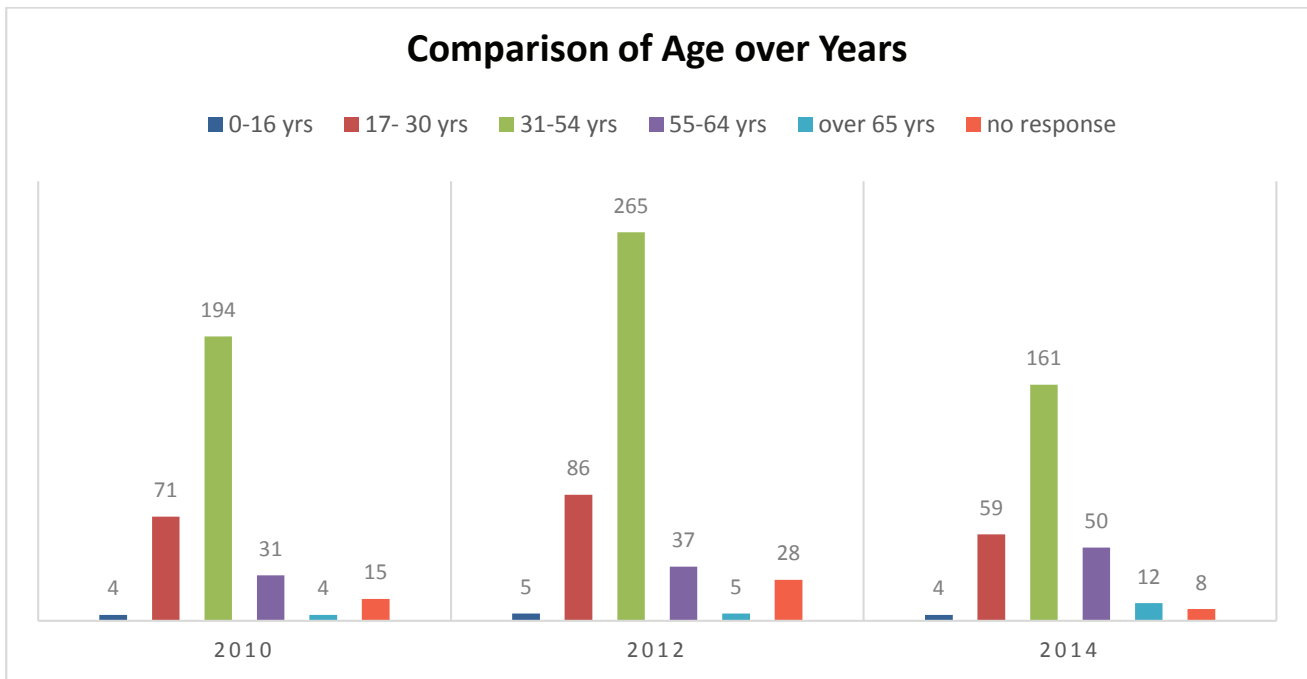


Figure 14

Figure 14 shows that there is no significant change in the number of respondents who identified themselves between the 0 - 16 years age range over the four years of PIT Counts.

Respondents in the 17 - 30 years age range increased from 2010 to 2012 and then decreased from 2012 to 2014.

There was a spike in the number of respondents identifying themselves in the 31 - 54 age range between 2010 and 2012, followed by a significant decrease between 2012 and 2014.

The number of respondents identifying themselves in the 55 - 64 age range increased from 31 people in 2010 to 50 people in 2014.

So, the number of respondents between the ages of 31 - 54 is decreasing while the number of respondents 55 - 64 and 65+ is increasing. This may be representative of an aging homeless population, in which those who are suffering from chronic homelessness were once represented in a younger age group. As they remain homeless, they are represented in an older age group. It may also mean that older individuals are becoming homeless later in life and thus creating a need for specific services for an aging population.

ETHNICITY

In this component of the demographics, surveyors were asked to provide observable ethnicities if and when possible. Therefore, the data for ethnicity represents surveyor observations and / or participant self-identified ethnicities. As a result, the category of other includes a variety of ethnicities as listed by the surveyors and / or those surveyed including: Oriental, Filipino, Black, Middle Eastern, Somalian, Romanian, South Asian and Mexican. It is also important to note that the category of Aboriginal includes Metis and First Nations.

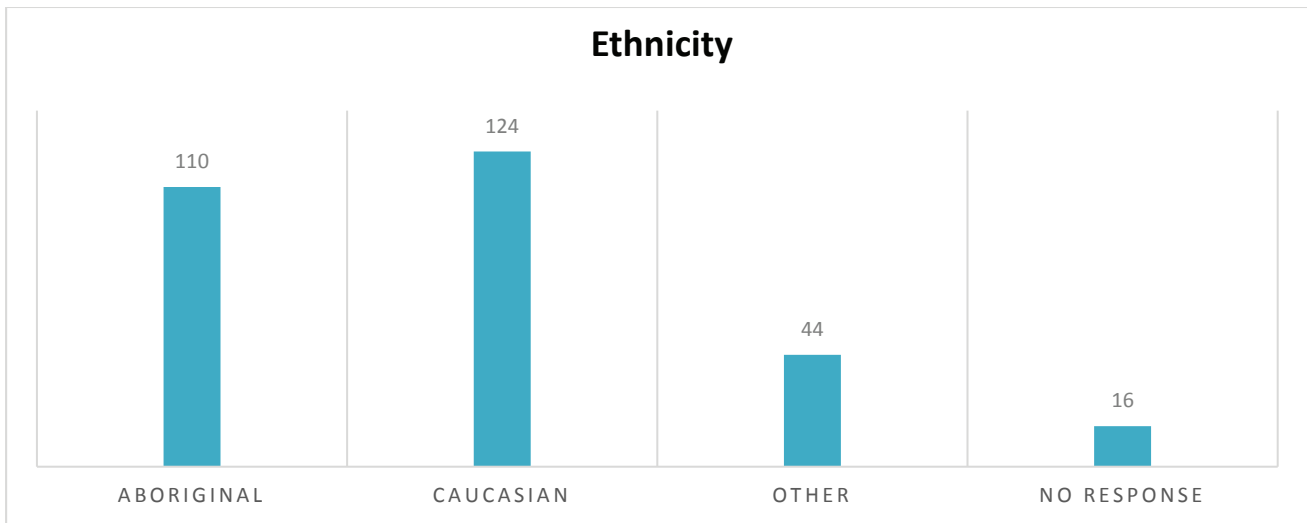


Figure 15

As Figure 15 shows, 110 people (37 per cent) of the total surveyed were observed / self-identified as Aboriginal. The number of Aboriginal individuals surveyed from 2010 to 2014 slightly increased. Relative to the total number of individuals surveyed, that has increased by 3 per cent since 2012. (See Figure 16).

There were 124 individuals who were observed / self-identified as Caucasian. This is 42 per cent of the total number of individuals surveyed and an increase since the 2012 PIT Count.

In the 2014 Wood Buffalo PIT Homeless Count, 44 (15 per cent) people surveyed were observed / self-identified as "other", down from 2012.

As well, the total number of individuals who did not respond to the ethnicity decreased from 2012 to 2014.

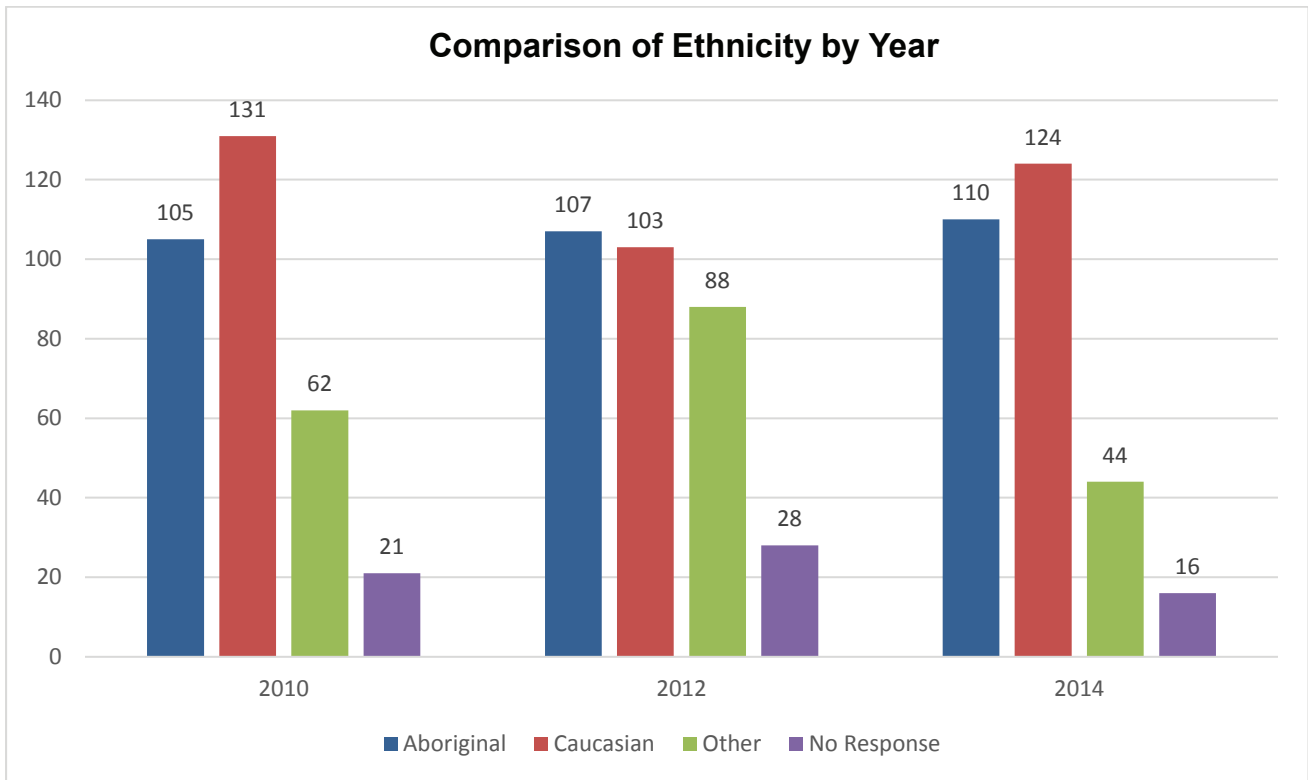


Figure 16

Figure 16 shows that the representation of Aboriginal individuals in the homeless population increased slightly from 2010 to 2014.

The representation of Caucasian individuals in the homeless population decreased from 2010 to 2012 and increased again from 2012 to 2014.

Those individuals who are included in the category of "other" increased from 2010 to 2012 and then significantly decreased from 2012 to 2014.

LENGTH OF RESIDENCY

This section of the report presents an overview of the survey findings from both the Street Count and Facilities Count. Unless otherwise stated, the data represents the total of those surveyed from both counts. Also, as respondents were not required to provide an answer to all of the questions, the data for these missing values are recorded as "no response".

Figure 17 shows how long individuals have been residents of Fort McMurray and how long individuals have lived in Canada. Note that in order to be consistent with previous years' PIT Homeless Counts, the questions regarding residency states "Fort McMurray" as opposed to "Wood Buffalo".

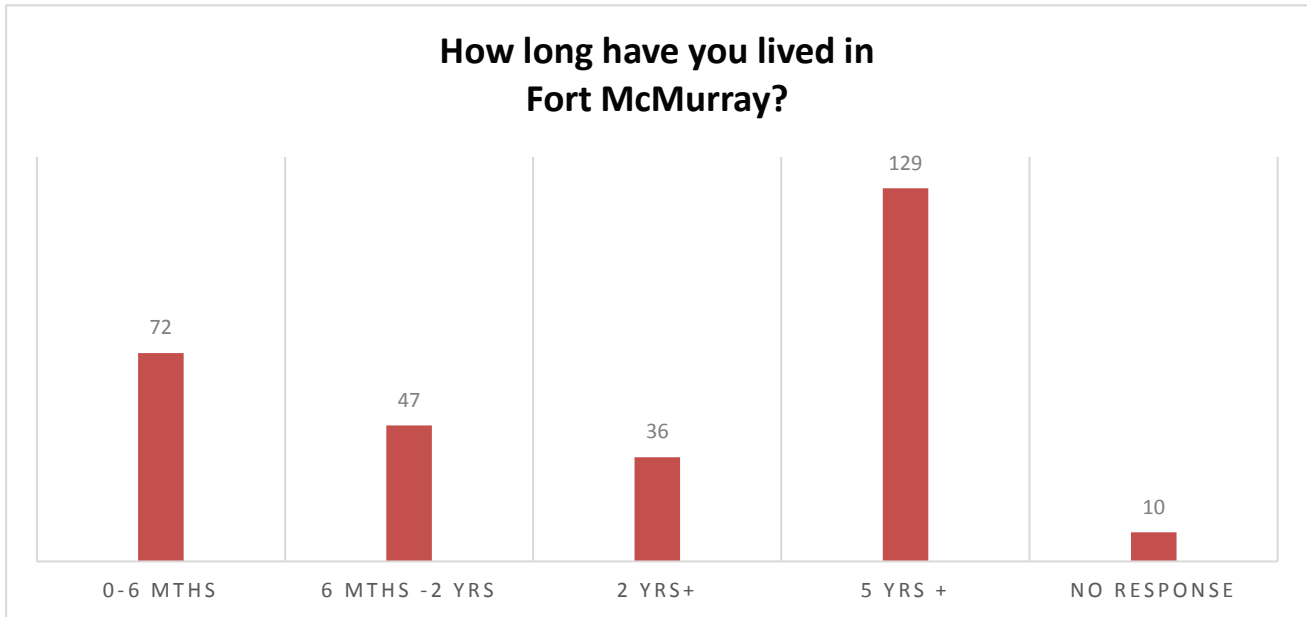


Figure 17

In the 2014 Wood Buffalo PIT Homeless Count, 44 per cent of those surveyed have lived in Fort McMurray for more than five years; 24 per cent less than six months and 28 per cent between six months and five years.

This has been a relatively consistent trend since 2010 as shown in Figure 18.

It is important to note that year ranges were slightly different in previous PIT counts and these differences have been accounted for in the following figure and will thus look slightly different than Figure 17, which represents only the 2014 Wood Buffalo PIT Homeless Count.

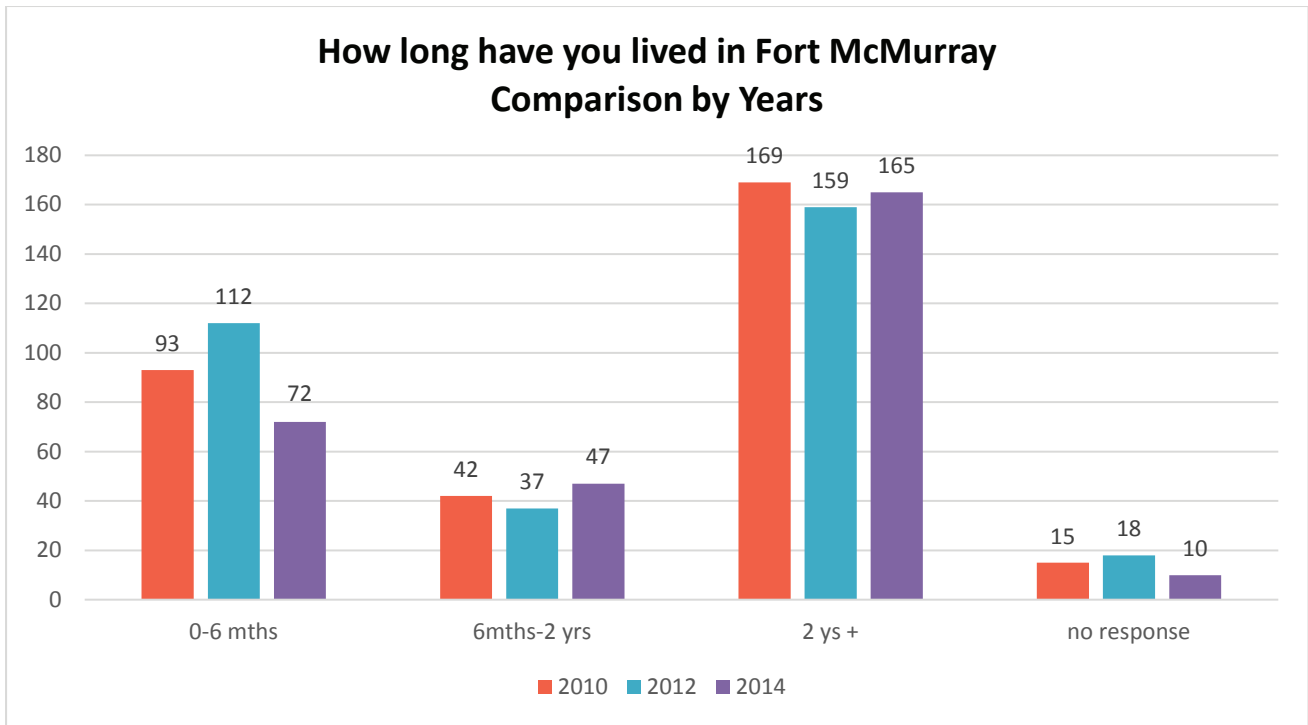


Figure 18

The number of people who said that they have lived in Fort McMurray for less than six months has decreased 36 per cent from 2012 to 2014.

From 2012 to 2014, there has been slight increases in those who have been in Fort McMurray between six months and two years. There has also been a slight increase in the number who have lived in Fort McMurray for more than two years between 2012 and 2014.

It is important to note that despite high rates of mobility within the province and the country, the majority of those who are experiencing homelessness have been residents of the region for more than two years. Figure 19 shows similar trends for those who are new to Canada.

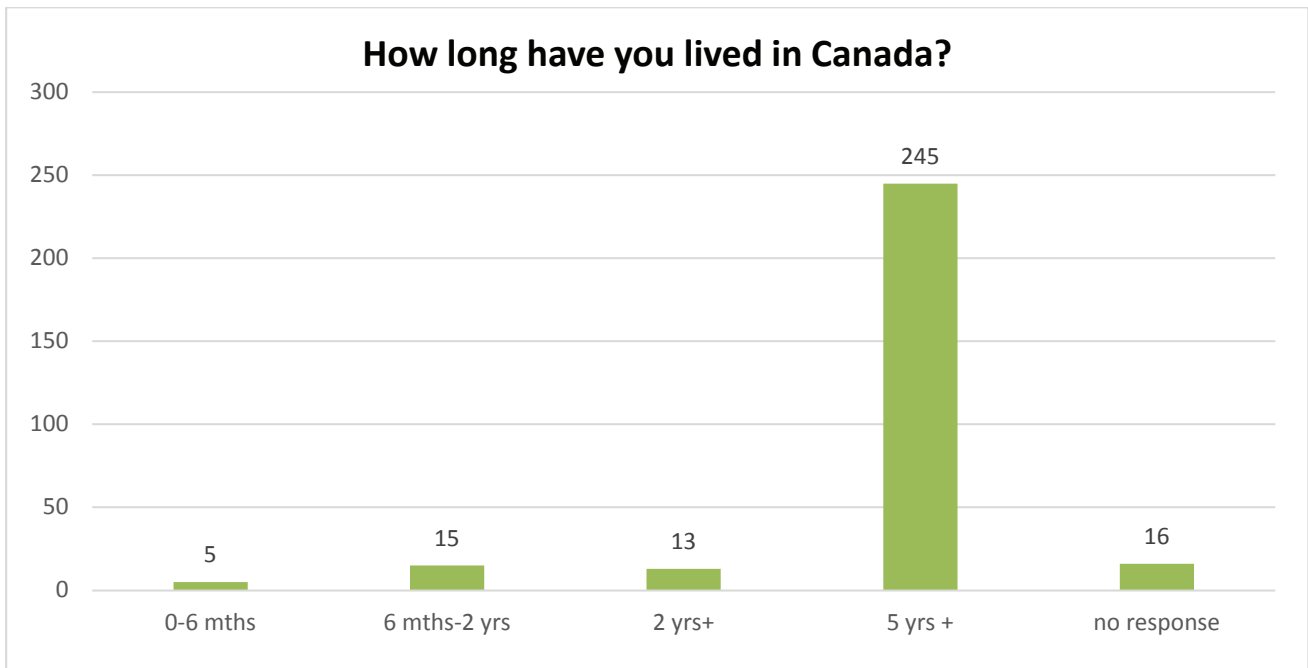


Figure 19

The majority of those surveyed (83 per cent) identified themselves as having been in Canada for more than five years. The smallest group (2 per cent) have lived in Canada for less than six months.

Despite high mobility rates from other provinces within Canada and immigration rates from other countries, the majority of homeless individuals are those who have both lived in Fort McMurray for over two years and have lived in Canada more than five years. Therefore, the homeless population in the Municipality consists mainly of long-term residents of both Wood Buffalo and Canada.

LENGTH OF TIME IN HOMELESSNESS

This section presents an overview of survey findings from both the Street Count and Facilities Count. Unless otherwise stated, the data represents the total of those surveyed from both. Also, as respondents were not required to provide an answer to all of the questions, the data for these missing values are recorded as "no response".

It is important to note that some of the individuals surveyed may have been in and out of homelessness for most of their lives and for different lengths of time. However, the following figures represent the responses for how long an individual has most recently been homeless.

Data regarding length of time in homelessness was not available in previous PIT Homeless Counts; therefore, comparisons over time cannot be made.

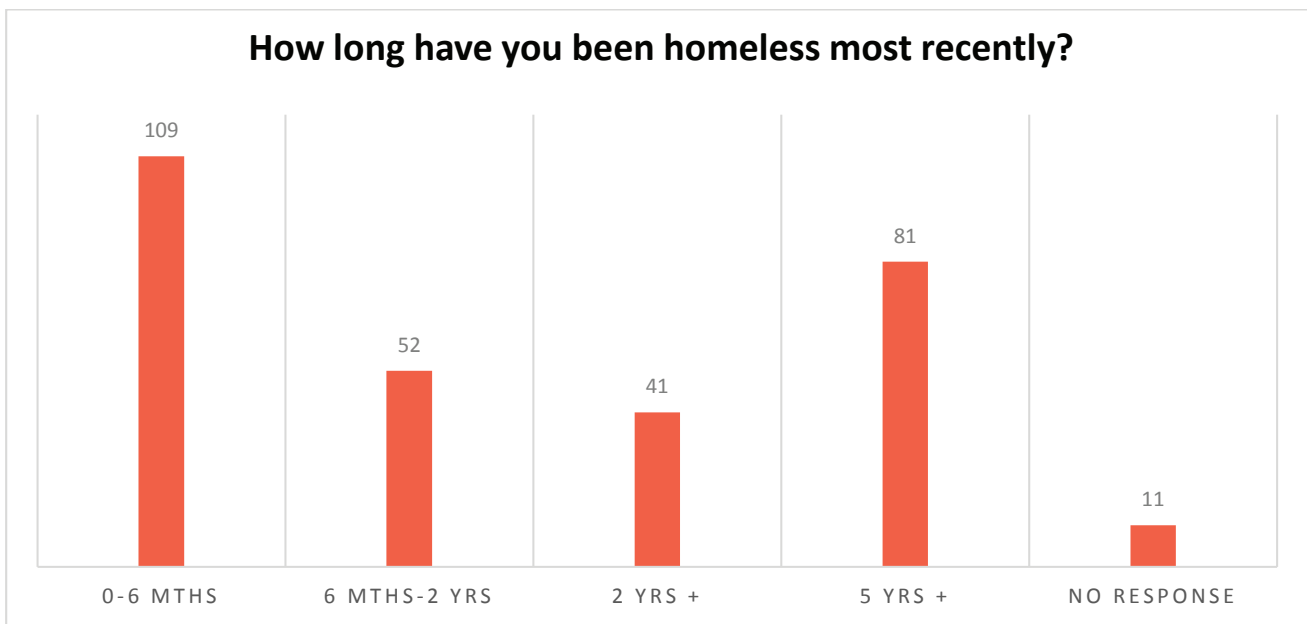


Figure 20

Figure 20 shows that 109 individuals (37 per cent) identified themselves as being homeless most recently for less than 6 months; 81 individuals (28 per cent) identified themselves as being homeless for more than five years.

122 individuals (41 per cent) of the 294 individuals surveyed **are living in chronic homelessness.** There was no data recorded on periods of homelessness and therefore this percentage is based solely on length of time in homelessness and does not include those who have experienced multiple periods of homelessness.

The number of those who experience chronic homelessness (see Figure 20) and the number who rely on emergency shelters (see Figure 4) show the pressure placed on emergency services in the Municipality. As was discussed in Wood Buffalo's report, "Heading Home: The Right Thing to Do - 10 Year Plan to End Homelessness 2010 – 2020", the cost of assisting those who experience chronic long-term homelessness is extensive and much more than the cost of supporting Housing First programs.

Further, it is important to offer support through Housing First to individuals in all stages of homelessness so that those who find themselves in episodes of homelessness do not become chronically homeless over time and those who are experiencing chronic homelessness have access to resources.

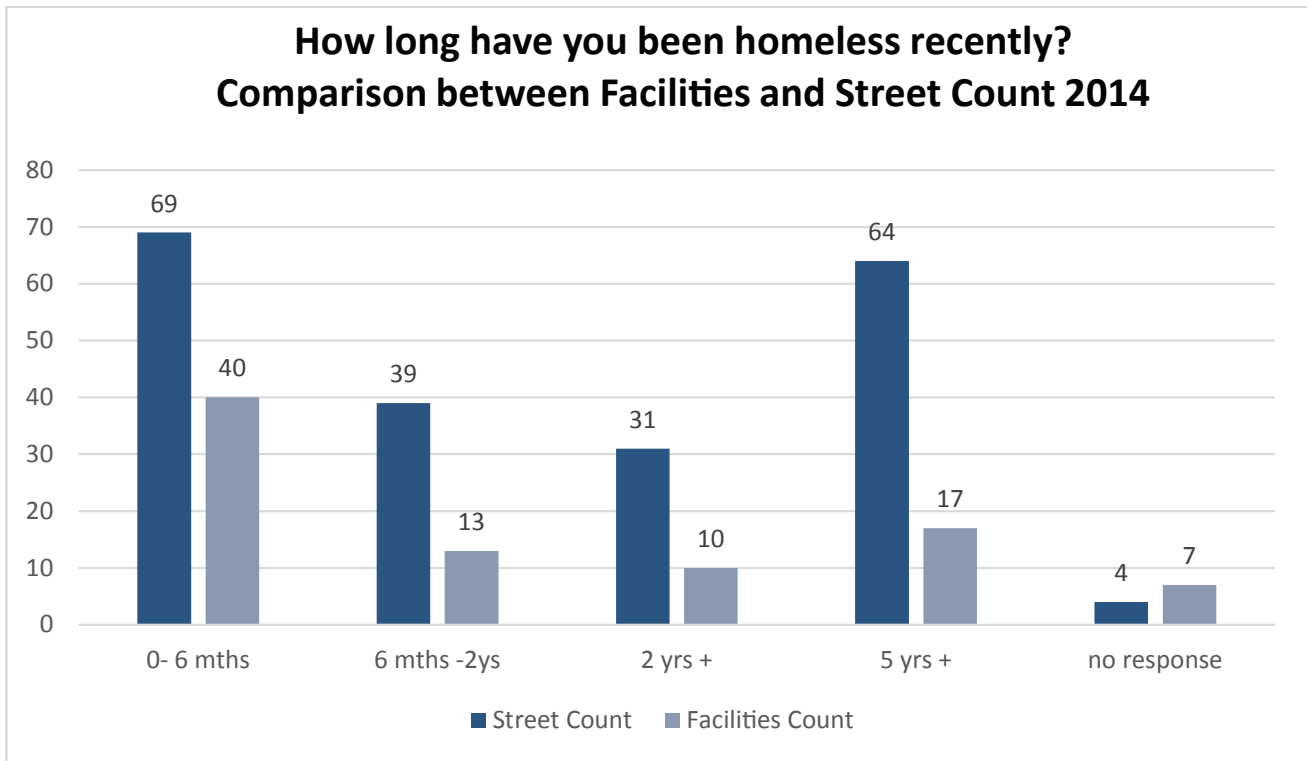


Figure 21

Figure 21 provides an interesting insight into the trends between homelessness and facilities use; 46 per cent of those surveyed in the Facilities Count have been homeless most recently for 0 - 6 months. The majority of those who were surveyed in the Street Count have been homeless most recently for either 0 - 6 months or more than five years.

CHILDREN IN HOMELESSNESS

This section presents an overview of survey findings from both the Street Count and Facilities Count. Unless otherwise stated, the data represents the total of those surveyed from both. Also, as respondents were not required to provide an answer to all of the questions, the data for these missing values are recorded as "no response".

The data provided on children and dependents in this section is based on the responses of the adults surveyed. For example, there was no record of children staying with an adult individual who chose not to participate in the survey. In the context of the 2014 Wood Buffalo PIT Homeless Count, children are defined as 16 years and younger.

Figure 22 shows the responses of individuals surveyed who had children in their care the night / day of the 2014 Wood Buffalo PIT Homeless Count.

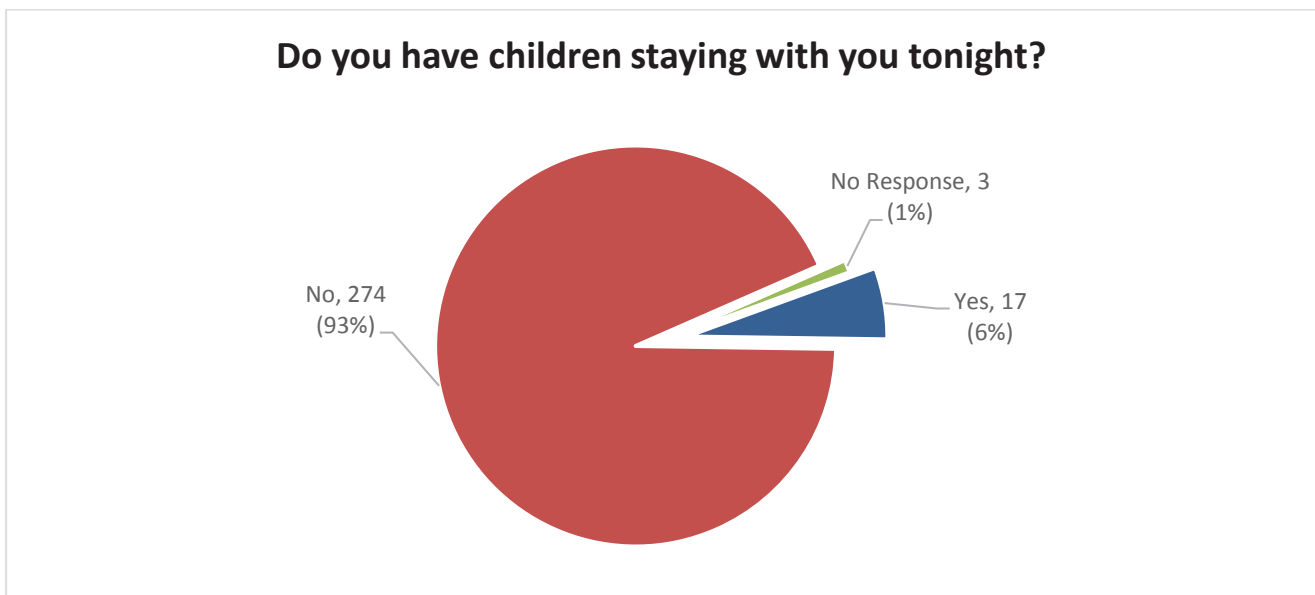


Figure 22

There were 17 people (6 per cent) of the total surveyed who responded "yes" they had children under the age of 16 years staying with them overnight; 274 (93 per cent) responded "no".

The number of children or the age of the children was not recorded.

Only one person responded that he/she would have the help of another adult to care for the children staying with him/her.

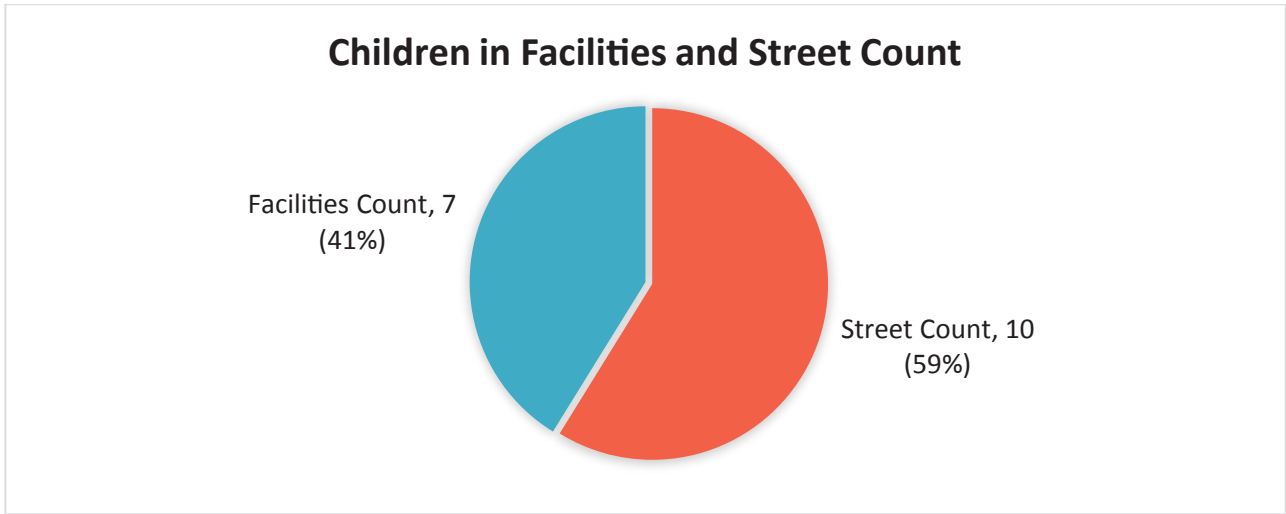


Figure 23

Of the 17 individuals surveyed who had children staying with them overnight, 10 were in the Street Count and seven were in the Facilities Count. (See Figure 23).

Determining where individuals planned to stay on the night of the 2014 Wood Buffalo PIT Homeless Count allows for a deeper look into the trends of those living in homelessness with children. (See Figure 24).

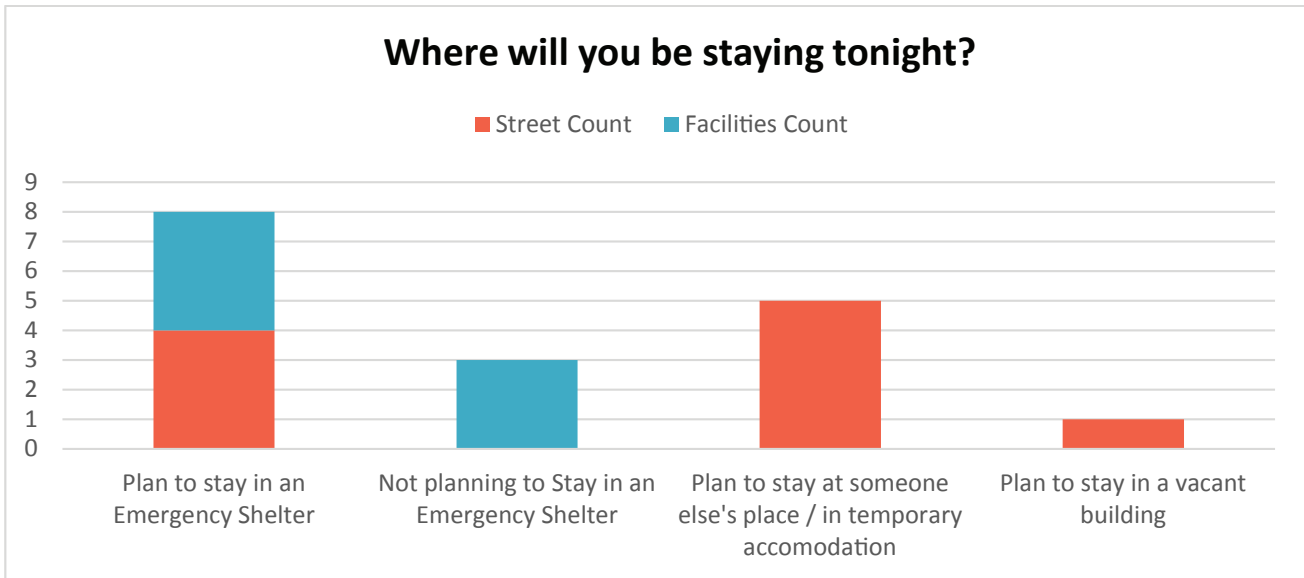


Figure 24

Figure 24 shows that eight individuals planned to stay that night in an emergency shelter and five planned on staying at someone else's place / in temporary accommodation. Only one person intended to stay in a vacant building (sleeping rough).

It is important to note that this particular survey question was different in the Street Count and Facilities Count. The Facilities Count survey did not provide an option for those who were not planning to stay in an emergency shelter to state where they were planning on staying. However, the three individuals who responded that they did not plan to stay in an emergency shelter were surveyed in a short-term housing facility; therefore, they would have temporary accommodation.

This data shows that almost all of the individuals surveyed that had children staying with them overnight were in an emergency shelter, in a short-term housing facility, at someone else's place or in temporary accommodation. Only one person would be sleeping in a vacant building (sleeping rough). This is important as it shows that on the night of the 2014 Wood Buffalo PIT Homeless Count, the majority of individuals with children would not be sleeping rough (on the streets or in places not meant for human habitation).⁹

⁹ As discussed previously in the section on Age, there were 4 individuals who were surveyed and who identified in the age category of 0 -16. Of these 4 children, 3 were surveyed in the youth shelter.

VETERANS IN HOMELESSNESS

This section presents an overview of survey findings from both the Street Count and Facilities Count. Unless otherwise stated, the data represents the total of those surveyed in both. Also, as respondents were not required to provide an answer to all of the questions, the data for these missing values are recorded as "no response".

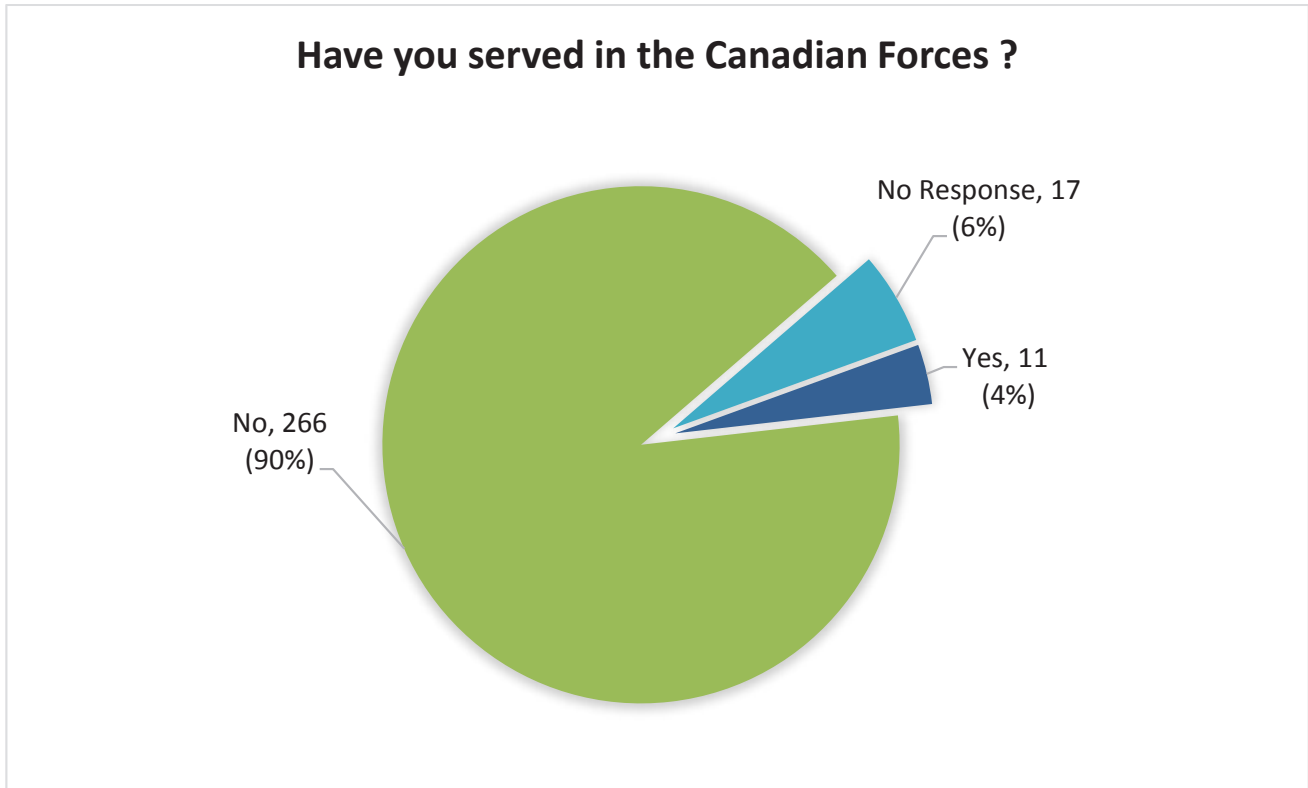


Figure 25

The majority of those surveyed (90 per cent) said that they had no military service in the Canadian Forces. Those that stated they had served in the Canadian Forces make up 4 per cent of those surveyed.

It is important to note that 6 per cent of individuals did not respond to this question.

Figure 26 shows that of those who said they had served in the Canadian forces, nine were surveyed in the Street Count and two were in the Facilities Count.

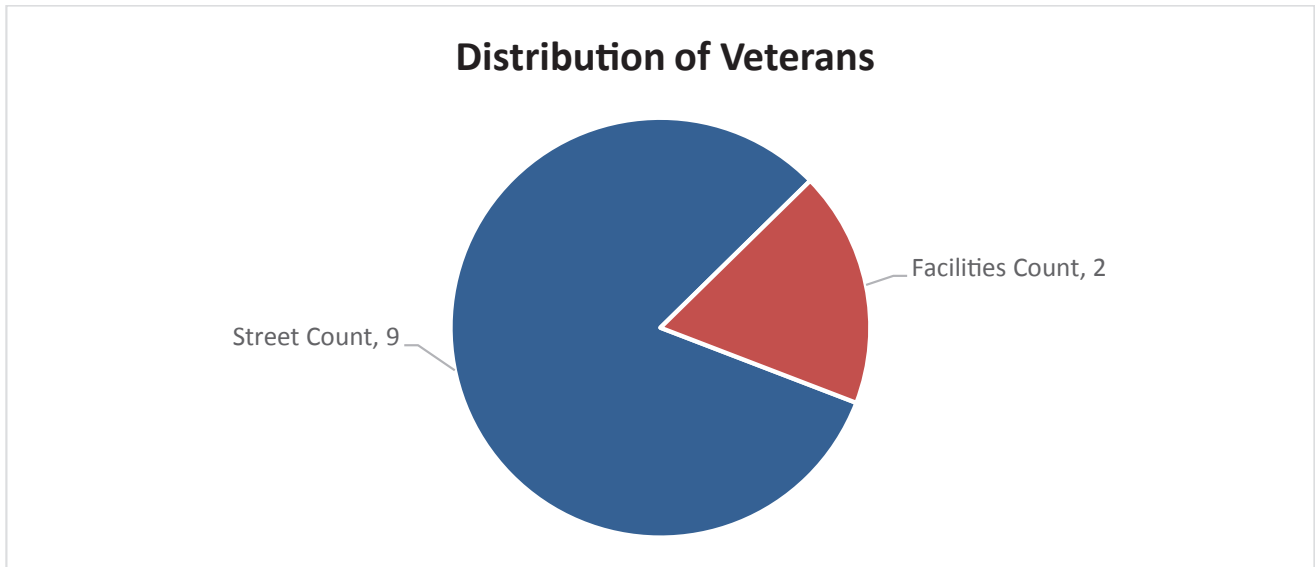


Figure 26

Further comparisons of veterans experiencing homelessness can be made to the 2012 Wood Buffalo PIT Homeless Count.

Figure 27 compares the ethnicity of veterans surveyed in the 2012 and the 2014 Wood Buffalo PIT Homeless Counts.

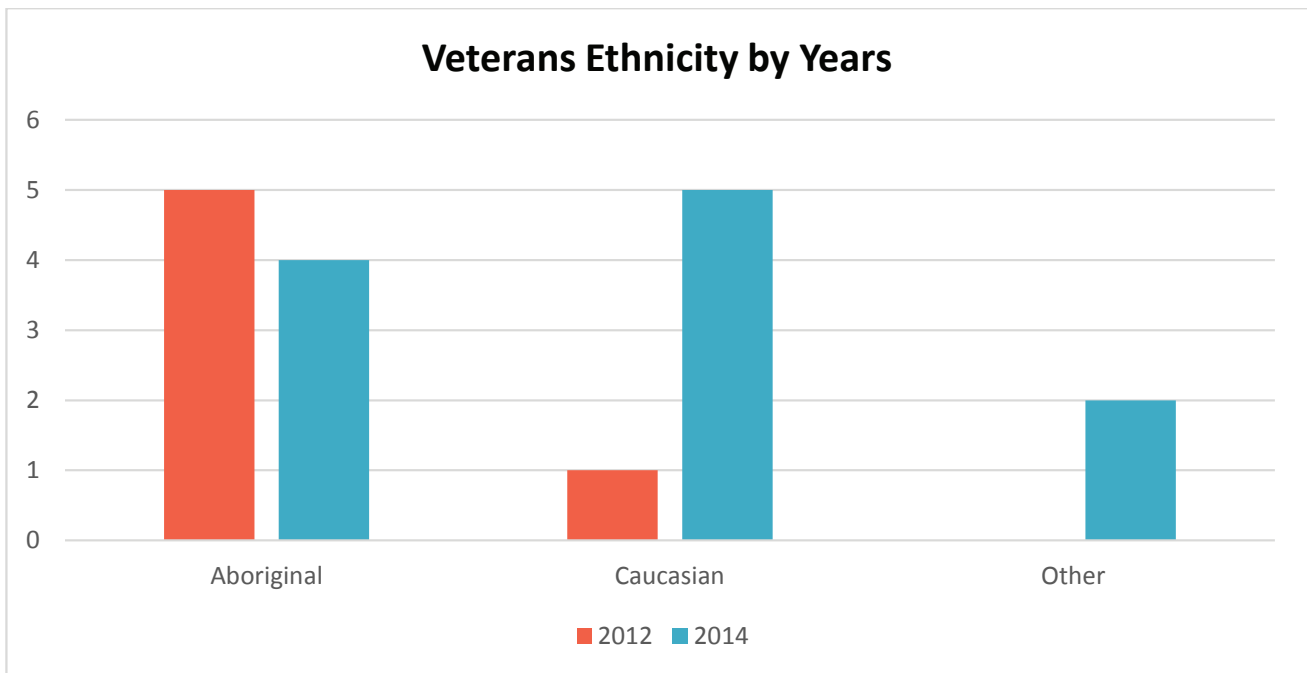


Figure 27

Figure 27 shows that there has been an increase in Caucasian veterans experiencing homelessness, and a decrease in Aboriginal veterans who are experiencing homelessness. Note that there are two individuals who were observed / self-identified in the ethnic category of "other" in the 2014 Wood Buffalo PIT Homeless Count.

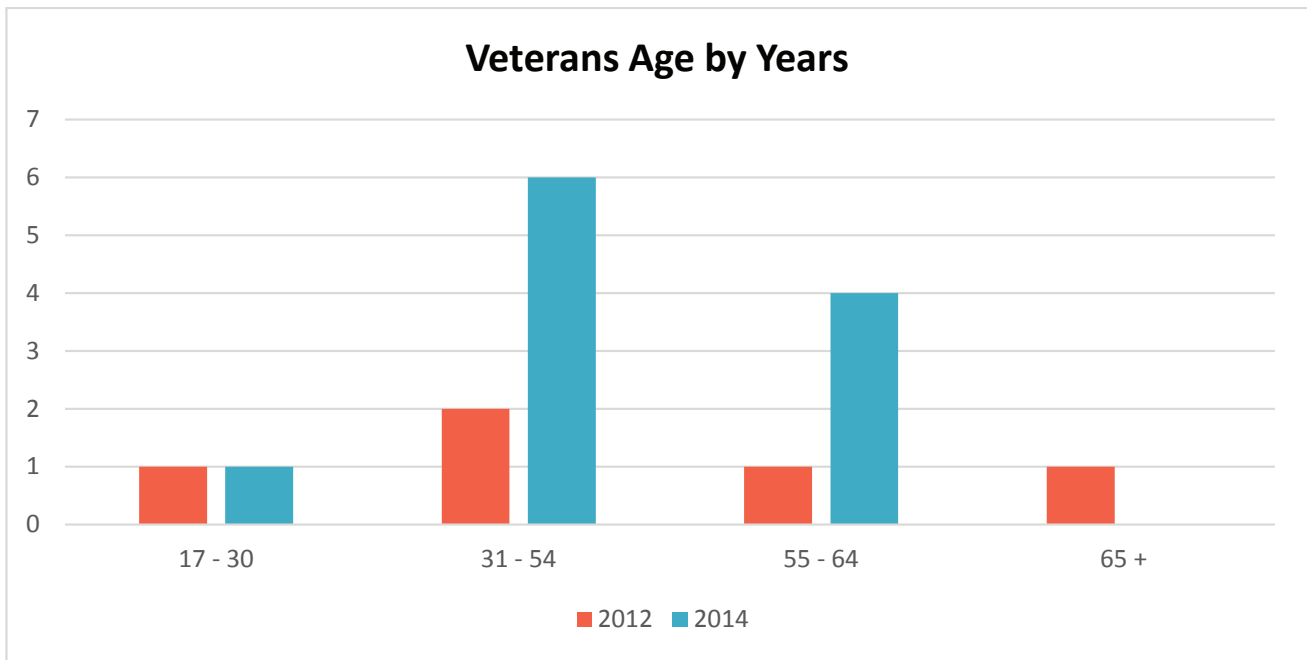


Figure 28

Figure 28 shows that although the total number of veterans has increased since 2012, the average age of veterans experiencing homelessness is still 31 - 54 years. Also, it is interesting to note that there were no veterans in the 2014 Wood Buffalo PIT Count that were surveyed in the 65 and above age category.

Though the number of veterans surveyed relative to the total population of homeless individuals in the Municipality seems small (4 per cent), there has been an increase of homeless veterans since 2012. This represents a need to ensure that veterans are accessing services that may help them out of homelessness and into permanent housing.

CONCLUSION

The 2014 Wood Buffalo PIT Homeless Count took place in the downtown core of Fort McMurray on the night of Tuesday, October 14th and the day of Wednesday, October 15th. There were 294 individuals surveyed that identified themselves as being without permanent residence.

As discussed in the report, significant trends include a high reliance on facilities, especially emergency shelters. Trends in demographics show an aging population of homeless individuals. Gender representation has remained comparatively the same since 2010. Ethnicity trends show that there has been a slight increase in Aboriginal representation and Caucasian representation, and a significant decrease in the category of “other” since 2010.

The data on children experiencing homelessness is based on 17 adult individuals who responded that they had children under the age of 16 staying with them on the night of the count. Only one respondent planned to spend the night in a vacant building. All other individuals with children in their care planned to stay in an emergency shelter, short-term housing facility, someone else’s place or temporary accommodation. Further, there were 4 individuals surveyed who responded that they were in the 0 – 16 age category, three of these four children were surveyed at the youth shelter.

The annual population growth rate in Wood Buffalo from 2000 to 2012 was 7 per cent and is expected to grow to 66 per cent by 2022.¹⁰ It is important to recognize that as the overall population of Wood Buffalo has increased at a rapid rate, the population of homeless individuals has decreased 10 per cent since 2012 and 46.4 per cent since the 2008 provincial launch of “*A Plan for Alberta: Ending Homelessness in 10 Years*”.

It is imperative that Housing First initiatives and associated services continue to develop in order to ensure that the homeless population continues to decrease and that preventative services can accommodate the influx of residents. Also, it is important that the current homeless population does not become displaced in the development and growth of the region.

Wood Buffalo’s plan to end homelessness, “*Heading Home: The Right Thing to Do*”, emphasizes that every person has the right to be housed. Data and analysis within this report demonstrates the successes of the many housing services in Wood Buffalo and the need for continued efforts towards ending homelessness in the region.

¹⁰ Regional Municipality of wood Buffalo, Municipal Census 2012. <http://www.woodbuffalo.ab.ca>

CHALLENGES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

There are limitations that are encountered in a Point in Time (PIT) Count. Primarily, PIT counts provide a snapshot of data and do not account for seasonal variations and other variables that fluctuate from day to day over the course of a year. This is, however, the research method that best serves the purpose of community research and allows for the most accurate results considering time and resources.

Challenges encountered specifically with the 2014 Wood Buffalo PIT Homeless Count include survey inconsistencies and missing data. These challenges and recommendations for future PIT Counts are discussed below.

The methods used to record responses during the survey were inconsistent. Some surveyors were not clear in their tabulation, making it difficult to evaluate some of the responses.

- It is important that future PIT Counts ensure that tabulation process is made clear and is reviewed in the volunteer training sessions. This will ensure that all surveyors use one consistent method.

The format of certain survey questions needed clarification. For example, there was not a clear way to differentiate whether ethnicities were in fact self-identified or if they were observed. Therefore, it had to be concluded that all responses were either self-identified and / or observed.

- In order to differentiate between surveyor observations and actual self-identified ethnicities, it is important that future PIT Counts ensure that there are separate columns that the surveyor can use for differentiation.

There were limitations to the year ranges used for both length of residency and length of most recent periods of homelessness. For example, those who were born in Fort McMurray were recorded in the five years and longer category. This does not distinguish between those who have moved to Fort McMurray and become long-term residents, and those who have been in Fort McMurray their entire life.

- In order to ensure full representation, future PIT Counts should allow for an open-ended response to questions regarding time periods. Then, when possible, there can be categorization of year ranges in analysis and reporting.

Data was based solely on those who were surveyed. This means that the total number of homeless individuals will not have included individuals who may not have given consent to participate but who may have in fact been living in homelessness.

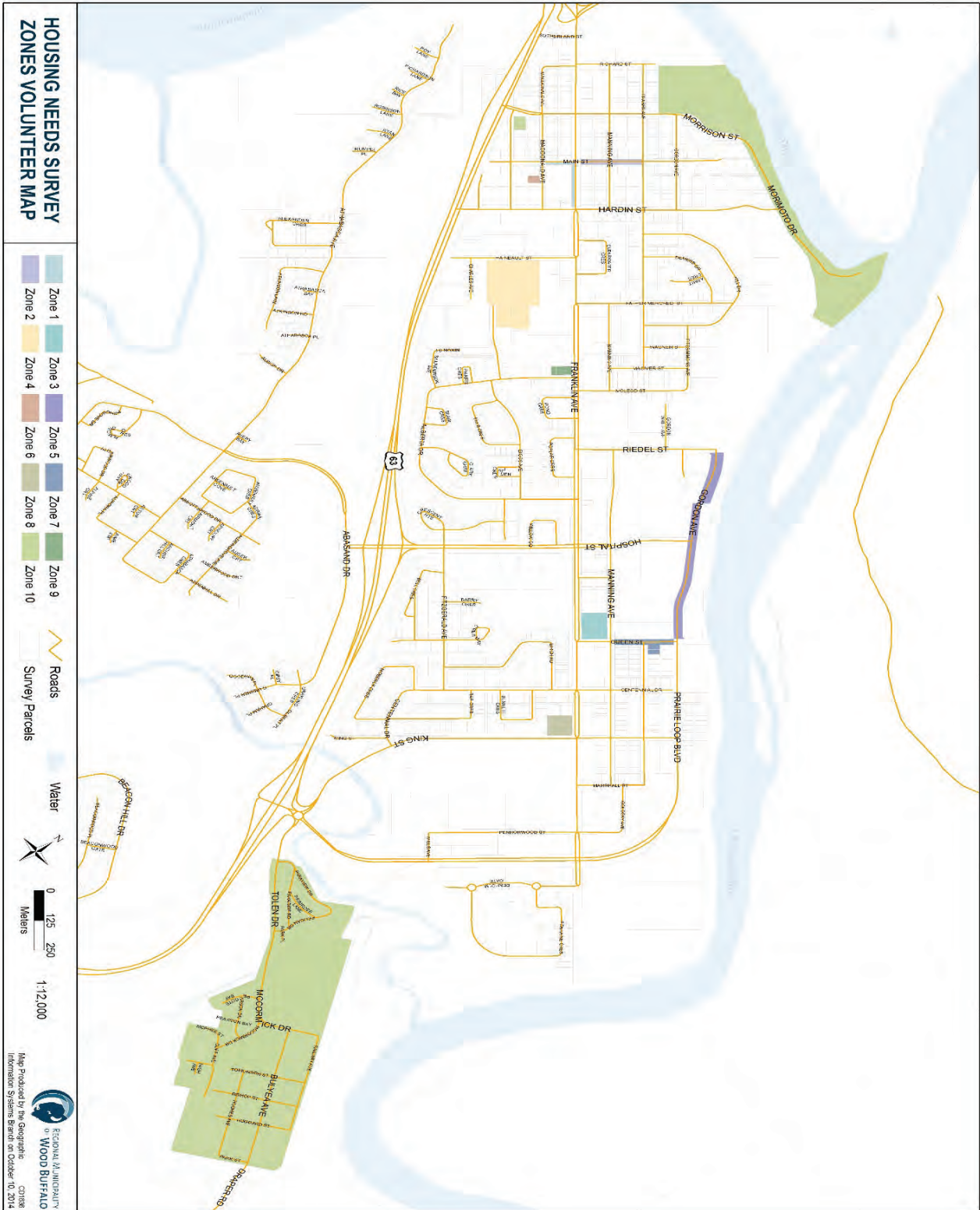
- There is not a clear way of bridging this gap. The alternative, which is enumerating all those in a facility regardless of their participation in the survey, may result in including those who do in fact have a permanent residence and are only using facilities on a temporary and circumstantial basis. Therefore, the key recommendation for future PIT Counts is to record enumerated data separately and use it for analysis and to provide a comparison to surveyed data.

Data was limited on children and dependents. This is in part due to gaps in survey formatting.

- It is important that future PIT Count Surveys ensure that survey questions are clear and allow for all appropriate information to be included.

Some of the challenges encountered in the 2014 Wood Buffalo PIT Homeless Count, reflect the natural limitations of a Point In Time Count and others are gaps that can be addressed in future counts to ensure the clearest and most accurate results possible.

APPENDIX B - ZONE MAP



Map Produced by the Geographic Information Systems Branch on October 10, 2014

FEDERAL UNIVERSITY
of **WOOD BUFFALO**

APPENDIX C - ZONE LIST

Zone 1 - Transit Stop at Provincial Building

Zone 2 - 7 Eleven Variety Store

Zone 3 - Save on Foods

Zone 4 - Safeway and Superstore

Zone 5 - Wal-Mart and Canadian Tire

Zone 6 - The Salvation Army

Zone 7 - Bottle Depot and Rona

Zone 8 - Mac's Variety Store

Zone 9 - Soup Kitchen

Zone 10 - Waterways, Snye, Borealis Park

Zone 11 - Centre of Hope

- There were no surveys done at Zone 10 as there were limited resources.
- Zone 11 is not displayed on the map as it was added by surveyors on the day of the PIT Count. It is geographically located in close proximity to Zone 9.