

**THE EXTENT OF HOMELESSNESS
IN THE KENAI PENINSULA BOROUGH**

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Executive Summary

In 2007, Love INC asked the Institute of Social and Economic Research (ISER) to conduct a study investigating the characteristics of the homeless population within the boundaries of the Kenai Peninsula Borough. Love INC is currently in the pre-development phase of creating a transitional housing facility on the Kenai Peninsula. ISER conducted phone interviews with relevant agencies serving the Kenai's homeless population. These interviews yielded demographic information on the homeless population and provided both the current housing status of Kenai homeless and reasons for homelessness today. Men, women, and youth utilize homeless services on the Kenai Peninsula; they are between the ages of 25 – 40 years old and the majority are ethnically Euro American or Alaska Native. The Alaska Housing and Finance Authority 2006 summer survey indicates 28 individuals were identified as homeless in the Homer area and 58 individuals were reported in the Kenai area while the other main communities of Seward and Soldotna were not included. The overall homeless population is difficult to enumerate because of their transience and because oftentimes a state of homelessness is variable and/or temporary. Given these constraints we estimate there are approximately between 400 and 500 homeless individuals on the Kenai Peninsula per year; the majority in the community of Kenai.

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INTRODUCTION

Purpose of Study

In May 2007, Dan Van Zee, Project Director of the Kenai Peninsula's Love INC Family Hope Center, contacted the Institute of Social and Economic Research (ISER) at the University of Alaska, Anchorage to conduct a study quantifying and documenting the characteristics of the homeless population within the boundaries of the Kenai Peninsula Borough.

Love INC is currently in the pre-development phase of creating a transitional housing program for low income families and those at risk of being homeless on the Kenai Peninsula. They serve as a liaison between neighbors in need, agencies, and churches since 1987. The transitional housing facility will be built in the Kenai/Soldotna population center area and will provide low income housing for those at risk of homelessness. In order to be eligible for funding this project, Love INC is required to do a feasibility study for funding that describes the homeless population for which very few data currently exist.

Love INC asked ISER to identify and quantify the Kenai Peninsula's homeless population using secondary data sources and phone interviews with homeless services agency personnel, i.e. State programs, non-profit organizations like shelters and meal programs, church groups, hospitals, and health centers. Specific information was collected on the demographics of this population through these interviews including age, gender, family makeup, ethnicity, and veteran status.

Homelessness in the United States

The federal definition of "homeless" in the United States Code, Title 42 Chapter 119, Subchapter I¹, homeless reads as:

1. An individual who lacks a fixed, regular and adequate nighttime residence; and
2. an individual who has a primary nighttime residence that is:
 - a. a supervised publicly or privately operated shelter designed to provide temporary living accommodations (including welfare hotels, congregate shelters and transitional housing for the mentally ill);
 - b. an institution that provides a temporary residence for individuals intended to be institutionalized; or

¹ Federal Definition of Homeless. www.hud.gov/homeless/index.cfm

- c. a public or private place not designed for, or ordinarily used as, a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings.

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) also considers a person homeless only when he/she resides in one of the places described below²:

1. In places not meant for human habitation, such as cars, parks, sidewalks, abandoned buildings (on the street).
2. In an emergency shelter.
3. In transitional or supportive housing for homeless persons who originally came from the streets or emergency shelters.
4. In any of the above places but is spending a short time (up to 30 consecutive days) in a hospital or other institution.
5. Is being evicted within a week from a private dwelling unit and no subsequent residence has been identified and lacks resources and support networks needed to obtain housing.
6. Is being discharged within a week from an institution, such as a mental health or substance abuse treatment facility or a jail/prison, in which the person has been a resident for more than 30 consecutive days and no subsequent residence has been identified and the person lacks the resources and support networks needed to obtain housing.
7. For example, a person being discharged from prison after more than 30 days is eligible ONLY IF no subsequent residence has been identified and the person does not have money, family or friends to provide housing.
8. Is fleeing a domestic violence housing situation and no subsequent residence has been identified and lacks the resources and support networks needed to obtain housing.

Accurate and comprehensive statistics are especially difficult to acquire for the homeless. This is mostly due to the often ambiguous, hidden and erratic reality of this population and typically varies greatly depending on local geography.

The U.S. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration estimate that as many as 3.5 million people experience homelessness in a given year across the United States.³ According to the U.S. Conference of Mayors, the overwhelming majority of homeless people in the U.S. are traditionally single men, while most homeless families consist of an unmarried mother and

² www.thn.org/continuum_care_docs/HUD_Definition_of_Homelessness.doc

³ Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, "Who is homeless?" http://www.nrchmi.samhsa.gov/facts/facts_question_2.asp.

children⁴. Additional research by the National Coalition for the Homeless⁵ found that across the U.S., most homeless individuals were males and a majority of these homeless individuals were African American.

Table 1. U.S. Homeless Familial Composition

Single Males	41%
Families with Children	40%
Single Females	14%
Unknown	5%

Source: National Coalition for the Homeless

Table 2. U.S. Ethnicity Estimates

African American	49%
Euro American	35%
Latino	13%
Native American	2%
Asian American	1%

Source: National Coalition for the Homeless

Again, all of these numbers listed above are estimates and represent overall national averages. Some individuals that are homeless are hard to account for such as those living in a car, boat, or RV. It is also difficult to identify many whom may be living in a housing situation where there is insufficient living space that may not necessarily utilize homeless public services— such as shelters—and therefore remain unaccounted for in many homeless surveys.

Homelessness in Alaska

The Alaska Coalition on Housing and Homelessness was created in 1989 as a partnership of faith-based and community organizations, public agencies, and concerned citizens. The 2005

⁴ United States Conference of Mayors, “Hunger and Homelessness Survey”, December 2005.

<http://usmayors.org/uscm/hungersurvey/2005/HH2005FINAL.pdf>

⁵ National Coalition for the Homeless, “Who is homeless”,

<http://www.nationalhomeless.org/publications/facts/Whois.pdf>

report⁶ completed by the Coalition estimated that roughly 14,000 Alaskans are confronted with homelessness on a yearly basis. The primary reason for homelessness in Alaska includes changes in economic status and the inability to pay increased housing costs. The Coalition also indicated that \$14 million is spent annually on homeless services in Alaska – including assistance with housing, health, education, social services, and public safety.

The Alaska Housing and Finance Authority also conducts a statewide survey of the homeless population twice a year (during the summer and winter). The most recent 2006 summer⁷ survey indicates that 2,741 individuals and homeless families were reported across 28 Alaskan communities. A total of 1,513 were reported as families with children and 1,040 homeless individuals (no children). In the Homer area, 28 individuals were identified as homeless and 58 individuals were reported in the Kenai area (the survey did not include the areas of Seward or Soldotna.) The survey indicated that most homeless individuals living in Alaska were accounted for in the following locations:

Table 3. Alaska Statewide Survey Homeless Locations

Emergency Shelters	33%
Unsheltered	29%
Transitional Shelter/Facility	24%
Living with Family or Friends	14%

Source: Alaska Housing and Finance Authority

Kenai Peninsula Borough

Geographically, the Kenai Peninsula Borough includes the Kenai Peninsula, Cook Inlet and the large unpopulated area in the northeast section of the Alaska Peninsula. The twin cities of Kenai and Soldotna are the population centers of the borough. The 2000 Census estimated the total population of the Kenai Peninsula Borough to be 49,691 people.⁸ Approximately 17,477 people

⁶Alaska Coalition on Housing and Homelessness. “Keeping Alaskans Out of the Cold” October 2005 report to Governor Frank Murkowski.

⁷ Alaska Housing and Finance Corporation. “Statewide Homeless Survey – Summer 2006.”

⁸ Alaska Community Database Online – 2000 Census - http://www.commerce.state.ak.us/dca/commdb/CF_BLOCK.htm

live across the four large communities listed in Table 4; and the remaining population is scattered in 33 other smaller communities across 24,800 square miles of the Kenai Peninsula Borough.

Table 4. Population of Major Communities, Kenai Peninsula Borough

Total Kenai Peninsula Borough	49,691
Homer	3,946
Kenai	6,942
Seward	2,830
Soldotna	3,759
Total (Four Major Communities)	17,477

Source: 2000 U.S. Census

There are 25,853 males in the Kenai Peninsula Borough and 23,838 females with a median age of 36.3 years. The 2000 Census⁹ for the Kenai Peninsula Borough estimated the population of the borough by ethnicity as:

Table 5. Kenai Peninsula Borough by Race

Race	Population	Percent
<i>Euro American</i>	42,841	86%
<i>Alaska Native</i>	3,713	7%
<i>African American</i>	229	>1%
<i>Asian</i>	480	1%
<i>Other</i>	2,428	5%

Source: 2000 U.S. Census

DATA COLLECTION

From August to October 2007, ISER contacted personnel at homeless serving agencies across the Kenai Peninsula to understand the specific demographics of the region’s homeless population. The agencies ISER contacted for the survey were located by their participation in the 2006 Alaska Housing and Finance Corporation Statewide survey (lists of agencies by community who self report homeless data by agency) and the Alaska Balance of State Homeless Continuum of

⁹ Alaska Community Database Online – 2000 Census - http://www.commerce.state.ak.us/dca/commdb/CF_BLOCK.htm

Care Activity chart which lists care providers by services and location in the state of Alaska. A list of the 25 agencies/service providers in the four main communities of Kenai Peninsula Borough: Homer, Kenai, Seward, and Soldotna, was created and these agencies were contacted by telephone. ISER's research differs from the Alaska Housing and Finance Authority study because ISER only targeted organizations on the Kenai Peninsula while the AHFC study includes the entire state; the ISER survey also provides qualitative data in addition to quantitative data which is presented in the form of respondent comments and suggestions in the conclusion section below.

Respondents were asked the following questions:

1. How many individuals and families are homeless in the Kenai Peninsula Borough?
2. What is their demographic profile?
3. What are their housing needs?

Respondents were contacted and asked questions about homeless services their organizations offer, the total number of individuals served by their organizations and about demographic data on homeless individuals including age, gender, and familial status. Meghan Wilson completed a survey form for each respondent contacted for the study. The survey instrument is located in Appendix A.

DATA ANALYSIS

Out of the 25 agencies that ISER contacted, seven agencies were unable to share information which included the following reasons: did not work with homeless population, were unable to differentiate between populations of homeless or not homeless, treated all patients the same regardless of status, or were not able to share information because of confidentiality reasons. Four agencies were no longer working with the specific homeless population and ISER was unable to establish contact with personnel at two agencies.

Fourteen surveys were completed with different agencies across the Kenai. Five surveys were completed in the community of Soldotna, four in Homer, three in Kenai, one in Seward and one that covers the entire Kenai Peninsula Borough. These services included a hospital, community service organization for the disabled, veteran's facility, three shelters, outpatient drug/alcohol facility, three food banks/food pantry, a state program (Women, Infants, Children or WIC) a public health center, a mental health center, and the school district that encompasses the entire borough. Contact information for these agencies can be found in Appendix B.

Findings

Findings are aggregated below by community (Soldotna, Homer, Kenai, Seward and the Kenai Peninsula Borough School District) and then by the name of the facility or organization.

Overall, we estimate there are between 400 and 500 homeless individuals on the Kenai Peninsula during an entire year, and the majority of the homeless population is in the community of Kenai. Men, women and youth all used the services provided by the various organizations and most of the homeless individuals were between the ages of 25 – 40 years old. Homeless individuals had varying family backgrounds and most of them were Euro American or Alaska Native.

Agency/organization personnel offered many reasons for homelessness on the Kenai including: alcoholism, unemployment, domestic dispute, or mental illness/depression.

Individuals and Gender

Survey responses show the total number of homeless individuals who were offered services in a given timeframe. The survey also identifies the gender of the individual adults (men or women) and the number of individual youth (no gender). Some of the communities in the Kenai Peninsula Borough worked very closely with the youth population while others focused their emphasis on adult homeless individuals. Across all of the organizations and communities; the total number of adult homeless individuals was split evenly between male and female.

For the community of Soldotna, there was a range of 3 – 147 individuals using services provided to the homeless. Most of the clients were adult males while only one organization in Soldotna provided services to youth.

Table 6. Soldotna Individuals and Gender

Facility or Organization	Total Individuals (timeframe)	Individuals (men)	Individuals (women)	Individuals (youth)
<i>Central Peninsula Hospital</i>	3 – 4 (per month)	1 – 2 (50%)	1 – 2 (50%)	0
<i>Frontier Community Services</i>	3 – 4 (small – a few years)	1 – 2 (50%)	1 – 2 (50%)	0
<i>Kenai Veterans Center</i>	6 (per year)	4 (67%)	2 (33%)	0
<i>Kenai Peninsula Food Bank</i>	147 adults, 64 children (per year)	95 (45%)	52 (25%)	64 (30%)
<i>Central Peninsula Mental Community Mental Health Center</i>	50 (per year)	38 (75%)	12 (25%)	0

The homeless population in the community of Homer assisted all homeless individuals (men, women and youth), although there appears to be more of an emphasis on youth and women with an average homeless population of 6 – 26 individuals per month.

Table 7. Homer Individuals and Gender

Facility or Organization	Total Individuals (timeframe)	Individuals (men)	Individuals (women)	Individuals (youth)
<i>C.I.C.A.D.A</i>	6 beds for men (in one month)	6 (100%)	0	0
<i>Homer Community Food Pantry</i>	27 individuals (Jan – Sept 2007)	17 (63%)	5 (18.5%)	5 (18.5%)
<i>Homer Public Health Center</i>	36 (in one year)	0	12 (33%)	24 (67%)
<i>Homer Haven House</i>	26 (per month)	0	13 (50%)	13 (50%)

In Kenai, one organization specifically helped only men, while two other organizations only helped women and youth. There was a large emphasis on youth in the Kenai area. The Kenai organizations helped roughly 10 – 143 individuals per year.

Table 8. Kenai Homeless Individuals and Gender

Facility or Organization	Total Individuals (timeframe)	Individuals (men)	Individuals (women)	Individuals (youth)
<i>Friendship Mission</i>	75 men (2005-2007)	75 (100%)	0	0
<i>Lee Shore Center</i>	143 women and children (year)	0	72 (50%)	72 (50%)
<i>Kenai WIC</i>	10 – 24 women and children (year)	0	10 – 12 (33%)	15 – 24 (67%)

For the Seward organizations, the distribution of individuals was split evenly across men, women and youth with an average number of homeless individuals per summer of 25.

Table 9. Seward Homeless Individuals and Gender

Facility or Organization	Total Individuals (timeframe)	Individuals (men)	Individuals (women)	Individuals (youth)
<i>Seward Christian Center – God Will Provide</i>	25 homeless (per summer)	9 (36%)	9 (36%)	7 (28%)

The Kenai Peninsula Borough School District collected data and information on the number of homeless youth who were part of the school district during the 2006 – 2007 school year. The Kenai Peninsula Borough School district covers all of the communities within the borough and only tracks homeless individual youth and their families who attended a school within the school district during the 2006 – 2007 school year. The school district estimated that during the school year, there were 235 total homeless students, 134 homeless parents, and 21 homeless infants and toddlers. Data collected by the school district found that 25 homeless families live in Kenai, 15 families in Soldotna, 16 homeless families in Homer and 1 homeless family in Seward.

Table 10. All (Kenai Peninsula Wide) Homeless Individuals and Gender

Facility or Organization	Total Individuals (timeframe)	Individuals (men)	Individuals (women)	Individuals (youth)
<i>Kenai Peninsula Borough School District</i>	235 homeless students; 134 parents; 21 infants and toddlers (06 – 07 school year)	Unknown (134 total adults)	Unknown (134 total adults)	(65%) 235 K-12 students; 21 infants/toddlers

Age Estimates

Age was divided into four categories; 1-16, 17-21, 21-60 and 60 and up. None of the agencies/organizations reported having any clients over the age of 60. Love INC specifically requested the age to be divided into the two distinct youth categories of 1 – 16 and 17 – 21 years old. However, it was hard to differentiate between ages 1-16 and 17-21 because many organizations consider youth to be 1-18 years old. Most of the agencies reported their homeless clients as being between the age of 21 – 60; with an average age of about 30.

The agencies/organizations in Soldotna had one distinct population – age 25 to 40 years old. The Kenai Veterans Center also described two distinct populations – those men who were homeless veterans from the Vietnam War (age 50 – 60) and those who are younger, sometimes women, or served in the war in Iraq (age 20 – 30).

Table 11. Soldotna Age Estimates

Facility or Organization	Age (1 – 16)	Age (17 – 21)	Age (21 – 60)	Age (60 and up)
<i>Central Peninsula Hospital</i>	0	0	3 – 4 (100%)	0
<i>Frontier Community Services</i>	0	2 (50%)	2 (50%)	0
<i>Kenai Veterans Center</i>	0	0	6 (100%)	0
<i>Kenai Peninsula Food Bank</i>	64 (30%)	0	147 (70%)	0
<i>Central Peninsula Mental Health Center</i>	0	0	50 (100%)	0

Homer agencies and organizations worked primarily with youths age 1 – 16 and those in the 21 – 60 age group. This homeless age group in Homer was described as being mostly 21 – 60 years old with an average age of 40 years old.

Table 12. Homer Age Estimates

Facility or Organization	Age (1 – 16)	Age (17 – 21)	Age (21 – 60)	Age (60 and up)
<i>C.I.C.A.D.A</i>	0	1 (17%)	5 (83%)	0
<i>Homer Community Food Pantry</i>	5 (18.5%)	0	22 (81.5%)	0
<i>Homer Public Health Center</i>	24 (67%)	0	12 (33%)	0
<i>Homer Haven House</i>	13 (50%)	0	13 (50%)	0

Kenai agencies mostly worked with those in the age groups of 1 – 16 and 21 – 60 and with the women primarily between the ages of 28-35 years old.

Table 13. Kenai Age Estimates

Facility or Organization	Age (1 – 16)	Age (17 – 21)	Age (21 – 60)	Age (60 and up)
<i>Friendship Mission</i>	0	0	75 (100%)	0
<i>Lee Shore Center</i>	72 (50%)	0	72 (50%)	0
<i>Kenai WIC</i>	67%	8%	25%	0

Seward is split evenly across all age groups although the agency described the specific homeless population as being under 30 years old.

Table 14. Seward Age Estimates

Facility or Organization	Age (1 – 16)	Age (17 – 21)	Age (21 – 60)	Age (60 and up)
<i>Seward Christian Center</i>	7 (28%)	10 (40%)	8 (32%)	0

The Kenai Peninsula Borough School District has a heavy emphasis on youth and those that are 1-18 years olds are included in the age group of 1 – 16 years old.

Table 15. ALL (Kenai Peninsula Borough School District) Age Estimates

Facility or Organization	Age (1 – 16)	Age (17 – 21)	Age (21 – 60)	Age (60 and up)
<i>Kenai Peninsula Borough School District</i>	256 (65%)	0	134 (35%)	0

Homelessness and Families

In general, it was difficult to establish a pattern of family makeup across all agencies and communities. Four categories were created to understand familial composition: 2 parents with children, 1 parent with children, single adult (no children) and 2 adults (no children). This family pattern differed by location and by facility/organization.

Soldotna organizations mostly worked with single homeless individuals with no children.

Table 16. Soldotna Homeless Families

Facility or Organization	2 Parents w/ Children	1 Parent w/ Children	Single Adult (no children)	2 Adults (no children)
<i>Central Peninsula Hospital</i>	N	N	Y	N
<i>Frontier Community Services</i>	Y	Y	N	N
<i>Kenai Veterans Center</i>	N	N	Y	N
<i>Kenai Peninsula Food Bank</i>	?	?	?	?
<i>Central Peninsula Mental Community Mental Health Center</i>	N	N	Y	N

Homer organizations described their homeless individuals as mostly being single parents (mostly women) who may have had a boyfriend but were not married.

Table 17. Homer Homeless Families

Facility or Organization	2 Parents w/ Children	1 Parent w/ Children	Single Adult (no children)	2 Adults (no children)
<i>C.I.C.A.D.A</i>	?	?	?	?
<i>Homer Community Food Pantry</i>	Y	Y	Y	N
<i>Homer Public Health Center</i>	N	Y	N	N
<i>Homer Haven House</i>	N	Y	N	N

Kenai organizations generally worked with families that had children (both single and 2-parent families).

Table 18. Kenai Homeless Families

Facility or Organization	2 Parents w/ Children	1 Parent w/ Children	Single Adult (no children)	2 Adults (no children)
<i>Friendship Mission</i>	N	N	Y	Y
<i>Lee Shore Center</i>	Y	Y	N	N
<i>Kenai WIC</i>	Y	Y	N	N

The Seward organization described their population as being numerous domestic partner arrangement in which couples were not married but may or may not have any children.

Table 19. Seward Homeless Families

Facility or Organization	2 Parents w/ Children	1 Parent w/ Children	Single Adult (no children)	2 Adults (no children)
<i>Seward Christian Center – God Will Provide</i>	Y	N	Y	N

Finally, the school district covers the entire Kenai Peninsula Borough and described their population as mostly single parents with some families of two parents or no parents (with another legal guardian).

Table 20. All (Kenai Peninsula Borough School District) Homeless Families

Facility or Organization	2 Parents w/ Children	1 Parent w/ Children	Single Adult (no children)	2 Adults (no children)
<i>Kenai Peninsula Borough School District</i>	Y	Y	N	N

Ethnicity

Across all communities and organizations, most of the homeless individuals are Euro American (75 – 100%) while in some organizations, 25% of the participants are Alaska Native.

Soldotna agencies primarily worked with Euro American individuals, as well as some Alaska Native homeless individuals (less than ¼ of the homeless population).

Table 21. Soldotna Homeless Ethnicities

Facility or Organization	Asian	Alaska Native	Latino	African American	Euro American (White)	Other
<i>Central Peninsula Hospital</i>	0	1 (25%)	0	0	3 (75%)	0
<i>Frontier Community Services</i>	0	1 (25%)	0	0	3 (75%)	0
<i>Kenai Veterans Center</i>	0	0	0	0	6 (100%)	0
<i>Kenai Peninsula Food Bank</i>	0	0	0	0	211 (100%)	0
<i>Central Peninsula Mental Community Mental Health Center</i>	0	12 (25%)	0	0	38 (75%)	0

Homer agencies also primarily only worked with Euro American individuals, some Alaska Native homeless individuals; as well as one individual African American.

Table 22. Homer Homeless Ethnicities

Facility or Organization	Asian	Alaska Native	Latino	African American	Euro American (White)	Other
<i>C.I.C.A.D.A</i>	0	1 (17%)	0	1 (17%)	4 (66%)	0
<i>Homer Community Food Pantry</i>	0	5 (18.5%)	0	0	22 (81.5%)	0
<i>Homer Public Health Center</i>	0	0	0	0	36 (100%)	0
<i>Homer Haven House</i>	0	13 (50%)	0	0	13 (50%)	0

Kenai agencies only worked with Euro American homeless individuals.

Table 23. Kenai Homeless Ethnicities

<i>Facility or Organization</i>	Asian	Alaska Native	Latino	African American	Euro American (White)	Other
<i>Friendship Mission</i>	0	0	0	0	75 (100%)	0
<i>Lee Shore Center</i>	0	0	0	0	143 (100%)	0
<i>Kenai WIC</i>	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA

The Seward agency only worked with Euro American and Alaska Native individuals.

Table 24. Seward Homeless Ethnicities

<i>Facility or Organization</i>	Asian	Alaska Native	Latino	African American	Euro American (White)	Other
<i>Seward Christian Center – God Will Provide</i>	0	8 (32%)	0	0	17 (68%)	0

The Kenai Peninsula Borough School District did not collect data on ethnicity for individual homeless youth.

Table 25. All (Kenai Peninsula Borough School District) Homeless Ethnicities

<i>Facility or Organization</i>	Asian	Alaska Native	Latino	African American	Euro American (White)	Other
<i>Kenai Peninsula Borough School District</i>	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA

Veterans Benefits/Status

Only three organizations reported that their homeless population received veterans’ benefits. These included the Central Peninsula Hospital in Soldotna (50% of their patients were receiving some types of veterans benefits including mental health services and healthcare), Kenai Veterans Center (all of their clients were receiving veterans benefits – including shelter and rehabilitation), and the Friendship Mission in Kenai where one homeless man was currently receiving benefits.

All other agencies/organizations reported that their homeless individuals were not receiving any types of veterans' benefits.

Current Housing

All of the agencies and organizations reported that their clients' current housing arrangements included "no housing at all" (14); but were staying in some sort of shelter (8) or other type of living situation. Other current housing arrangements include:

Table 26. Current Housing

Current Housing	Responses of Organization
No Housing at All	14
Some sort of Shelter	8
Live with friends or family	4
Flee from domestic abuse/violent situation	3
Live in car, camper or motor home	2
Other: relocation to Kenai, no affordable housing	2
Currently being evicted	2
Looking for help	1
Veterans are sent to an out of state facility if needed	1
Live in churches (temporary)	1
Camping on family or friends property	1
Poor conditions	1
Poor conditions	1

Reasons for Being Homeless

There were many reasons for homelessness that the agencies/organizations reported on behalf of their clients. Alcoholism or drug abuse, unemployment, domestic dispute and mental illness, or depression were the most often cited reasons for being homeless.

Table 27. Reason for Homelessness – Number of Responses

Reason	Responses of Organization
Alcoholism/Drug Abuse	8
No Work	7
Domestic Dispute	7
Mental Illness/Depression	7
Medical Conditions	4
Work but low pay	3
Other: New to area, high cost of living	3
Physical Disability	2
Other: Legal Problems	1
Other: Long Term Rehab needed	1
Other: Lack of Support for Youth	1
Other: Newly single/lost partner	1
Other: Just Lazy	1

Length/Duration of Homelessness

Responses were varied on the duration of homelessness (short term vs. long term) and if there was a seasonal component to the homelessness. Four agencies/organizations (Central Peninsula Hospital – Soldotna, Frontier Community Services – Soldotna, Kenai Peninsula Food Bank – Soldotna and Kenai WIC - Kenai) did not collect this kind of data or the experienced data fluctuations from year to year¹⁰ or, they were unable to sufficiently state or identify particular trends. Six agencies/organizations (Kenai Veterans Center – Kenai, Friendship Mission – Kenai, Lee Shore Center- Kenai, Homer Public Health Center – Homer, Seward Christian Center – Seward, and Kenai Peninsula School District) stated the length of homelessness of their clients was short term (less than 1 year) while two agencies/organizations (Central Peninsula Hospital – Soldotna, Homer Community Food Pantry – Homer) had clients that were long term or suffered from chronic homelessness (more than 1 year). Also, two stated that there was a pattern to homelessness and that their client base stayed consistent throughout the year (C.I.C.A.D.A - Homer and Central Peninsula Community Mental Health Center - Soldotna). Four agencies (Kenai Veterans Center - Kenai, Homer Community Food Pantry - Homer, Homer Public Health Center - Homer and Seward Christian Center in Seward) reported that they had a larger influx of

¹⁰ For example, one year more homeless individuals were at the organization in the summer; the next year they had more homeless individuals in the winter months.

clients in the summer months and in the winter months clients seemed to disappear to other locations.

Overall Findings

This study finds that there are approximately 400 – and 500 homeless individuals per year on living on the Kenai Peninsula taking into consideration the base number provided by the school district of 390 individuals and survey responses of community agencies. Calculating an exact number of homeless individuals using secondary data collection techniques was difficult because many of the agencies included in the survey serve other disadvantaged populations in addition to the homeless. The survey used by ISER to gather data is a period prevalence count – that is, whom is homeless over a given period of time. Homeless populations are understandably highly transient: some may find housing; some may currently be losing their housing, or may stay at facility for a short or extended amount of time. Other issues include those “hidden” homeless individuals whom are accounted for because they are currently not using homeless services on the Kenai Peninsula; some may move to other locations into more permanent housing, while others may or may not continue to be chronically homeless. Finally, the data could suggest that there is a need for a transitional housing facility in the Kenai community area because it has the highest number of reported homeless people for the major Borough cities and a lack of facilities to provide for them.

The picture of homelessness on the Kenai Peninsula Borough is different from overall Alaska and U.S. homeless statistics and data. The homeless population on the Kenai Peninsula is composed of many women and children at almost 50% of the homeless individuals using services provided by the organizations we surveyed. This is different from national statistics on homeless that report that roughly 41% of homeless individuals are single men. Reports on homelessness from agencies such as women’s shelters expose the domestic violence issues that plague many communities in Alaska. The National Coalition on Domestic Violence gathered data on Alaska and according to the winter 2003 Homeless Service Providers Survey in Anchorage, 24% of the women surveyed reported that they were victims of violence.¹¹ In

¹¹ National Coalition Against Domestic Violence. <http://www.ncadv.org/files/Alaska.pdf>

addition, the Coalition also reports that Alaska ranks in the top five states in the country for per capita domestic violence rates¹². There are gender differences and many of the surveyed organizations report that women and children are using many of the shelter facilities on the Kenai Peninsula while men have their own facilities and organizations for help with housing. However, our survey data cannot demonstrate a clear trend on which gender group has more assistance because the survey lacks depth primary data collection would provide. The data does suggest, however, the need for a facility that could provide for victims—including children—of domestic violence in the Kenai area.

The Kenai Peninsula Borough School District reported that during 2006 – 2007 there were a total of 390 homeless individuals (youth to adult) as members of the homeless population and had at least one child attending a school within the district. This number only includes families that are accounted for in the school district and therefore does not include all possible homeless individuals. The community of Kenai has the largest population within the borough at 6,942 people; and roughly 10 - 143 homeless individuals every year. Homer has 3,946 total residents with 3 - 211 homeless individuals per year. Soldotna has a population of 3,759 and roughly 3 – 211 homeless individuals per year. Finally, Seward has the smallest population of the community surveyed (2,830 residents) and the smallest population of homeless individuals (25/year). In sum, we estimate there are approximately between 400 and 500 individuals a year on the Kenai who find themselves homeless. It appears the majority of this population is in the community of Kenai. A more accurate count could only be obtained through a study that physically counted individuals throughout a year.

CONCLUSION

In the view of survey respondents, the proposed transitional housing facility on the Kenai Peninsula is indeed very timely and much needed. The results of this study support the need to establish the new transitional housing facility, create new services, and improve the lives of the homeless population near the community of Kenai.

¹² National Coalition Against Domestic Violence. <http://www.ncadv.org/files/Alaska.pdf>

Recommendations and Comments from Survey Participants

Agency personnel offered recommendations and comments to Love INC as they begin to build their transitional housing facility. Many personnel expressed the need and desire to have this facility built while others offered recommendations for the facility to be successful. The following comments reflect the range of their sentiments:

1. *Good project - I hope it works out. Others can mess up the system.*
2. *Really good for the community - looking forward to working with them!*
3. *This project is needed! It is going to start to get cold and people will need these services*
4. *This project is needed very badly!*
5. *If you build it they will come.*
6. *Huge need for housing.*
7. *Transitional housing is needed. Men have more places to go.*
8. *Huge need for housing.*
9. *Be very strict with drugs and alcohol or premises - in reality, a lot of the population will have issues with substance abuse. Use the Safe House in Anchorage as a good model to keep drug/alcohol use off of property.*
10. *Regarding money - taxpayers will only provide so much.*
11. *Be aware of young people coming back from Iraq - need to make sure their needs are met (problems with suicide, anxiety and divorce).*
12. *Don't break up families if possible.*
13. *Do something for the youth - no emergency shelter for them and what about those for going in and out of treatment – can't be part of transitional housing.*
14. *Public assistance doesn't always help.*
15. *Low income = stick to your guns rather than no income. No income will create more problems.*
16. *The need for washing machines and dryers at facility.*
17. *Would like to see programs for assistance in being moms, parenting support/education.*

APPENDIX A

Homeless Survey Instrument

LOVE Inc., Kenai Peninsula Homeless Study

In 2007, Love Inc. Family Hope Center based in the Kenai Peninsula contracted with the Institute of Social and Economic Research to conduct a small study to quantify and study the characteristics of the homeless population that lives within the boundaries of the Kenai Peninsula Borough.

Love Inc. is in the pre-development phase of creating a transitional housing program for low income families on the Kenai Peninsula. They are required to complete a feasibility study for funding that describes this population for which very few data currently exists. Phone interviews are being conducted with numerous personnel who work with or administer services to the homeless population on the Kenai Peninsula. Would you be willing to take time out of your day to answer a few questions?

Yes, Continue.....

Date: _____

Contact Name/Email: _____

Phone: _____

Address: _____

Facility/Organization Name: _____

Facility/Organization Type: _____

Programs offered by Facility/Organization:

What kind/how often does your Facility/Organization collect data?

1. Tally of Number of Individuals (estimate):

of individual men: _____

of individual women: _____

of individual youth (under 18 years): _____

Individuals	Number	% of Total
Men		
Women		
Youth		
Total		

2. Age Estimates (numbers):

1 – 16 years old:

17- 21 years old:

21 – 60 years old:

60 and up:

Age	Number	% of Total
1 – 16 years old		
17 – 21 years old		
21 – 60 years old		
60 and up		
Total		

3. Family Makeup:

2 parents	1 parent (m or f)	Single	Adults (no children)

4. Ethnicity Estimates:

Asian:

Native:

Latino:

Black:

White:
Other:

Ethnicity	Number	% of Total
Asian		
Native		
Latino		
Black		
White		
Other		
Total		

5. How many homeless people do you know that are currently receiving any type of veterans benefits?

Number: _____

Percent: _____

6. Current housing:

None: _____

Live with Family: _____

Live with Friends: _____

Being Evicted: _____

Poor Conditions: _____

Other Housing: _____

7. Possible Reasons for Homelessness:

Reason	Number	Percent
No Work		
Work but low pay		
Medical Conditions		
Domestic Dispute		
Alcoholism		
Physical Disability		
Mental		

Illness/Depression		
Other:		
Total		

8. Average Length of Homelessness:

Beginning Date: _____

Total length: _____

9. Recommendations for Project/Love Inc.:

10. Any documents that your organization/facility collects that would be useful to this project?

Thank you!!

APPENDIX B

Contact Information

Confidential contact information suppressed here.

Confidential Raw Data Suppressed

APPENDIX C