

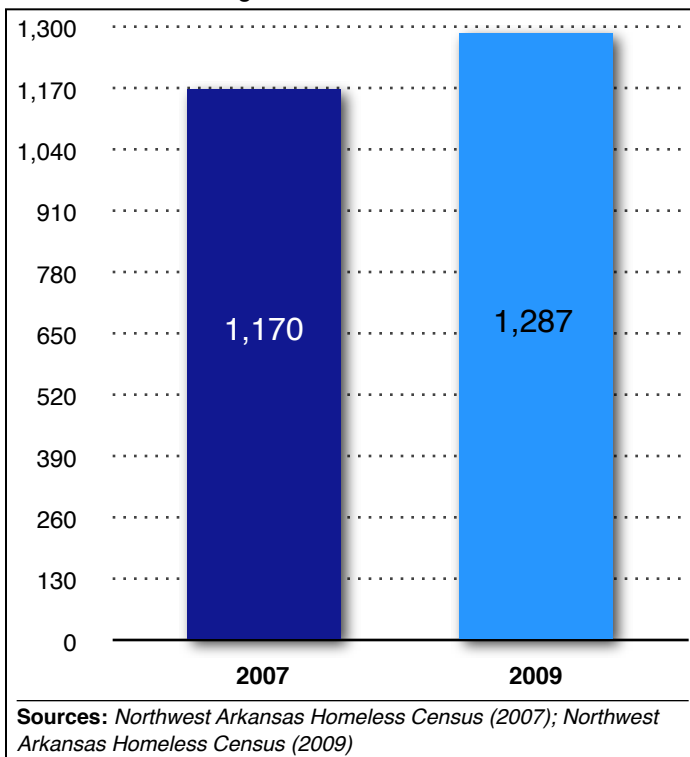
Community Fact Sheet

Counting NWA's Homeless: Preliminary Results from the 2009 Homeless Census

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Figure 1. Total Estimate of Homeless Persons
Benton and Washington Counties



The 2009 point-in-time (PIT) homeless census in Northwest Arkansas was recently completed and the news, as expected, is not good. In the midst of a changing real estate market with record foreclosures an economy on the downturn, rising unemployment rates, and slowing growth in home construction and development, the number of homeless in Northwest Arkansas increased by 10 percent since 2007, from an estimated 1,170 persons to 1,287.

Youth at Risk

A substantial number of homeless persons in the Northwest Arkansas region are youth. Fully one-quarter of those counted in shelters, food pantries, soup kitchens, and day centers were under the age of 18, and half of those youth were under the age of 6. These youth were identified by their parents or guardians as residing with them in a variety of circumstances including shelters, hotels, homes of friends or relatives, and even the streets (car, camping, abandoned buildings etc.).

Figure 2. Age of Homeless Respondents (2009)
Benton and Washington Counties

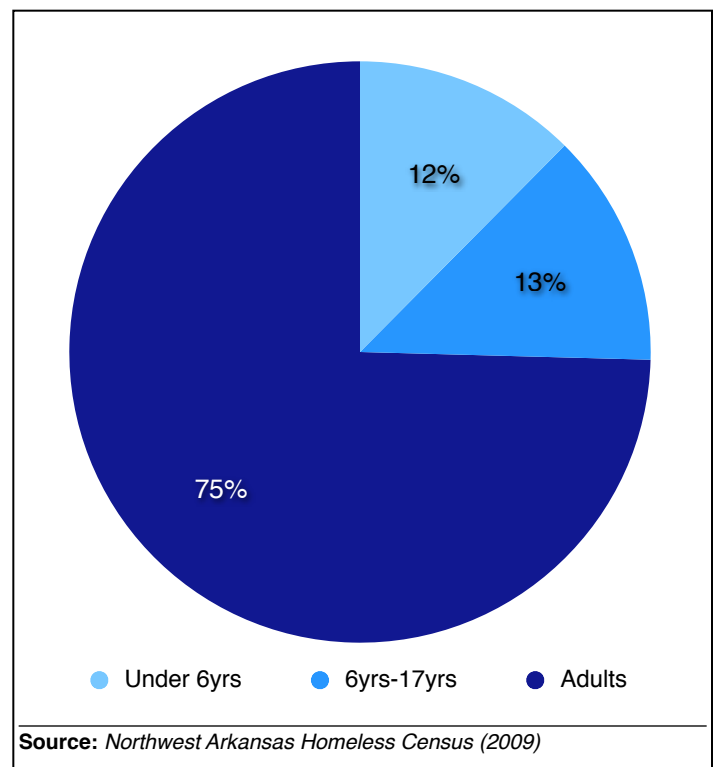


Figure 3. Total Number of Homeless Youth: K-12
Benton and Washington Counties

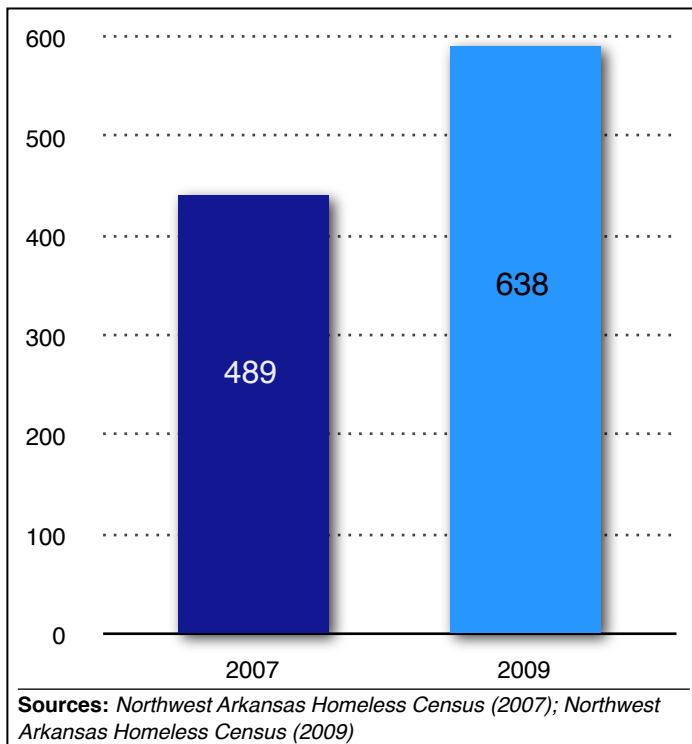
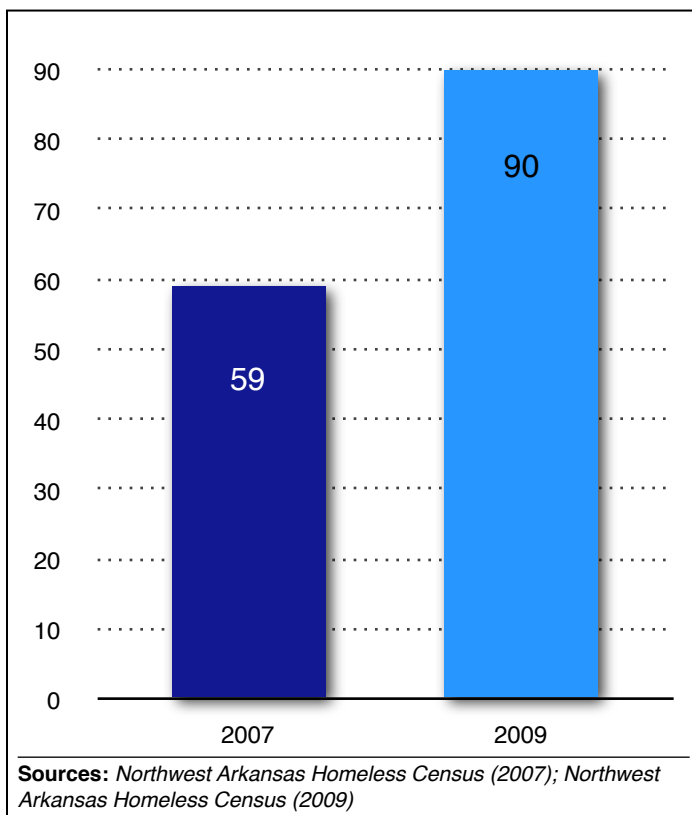


Figure 4. Total Number of Homeless Youth Residing with Interviewed Adults
Benton and Washington Counties



Clearly, the story behind the homeless census and the preliminary data presented here is that the growth in the size of the homeless population in Northwest Arkansas is largely a function of the increasing number of youth.

As seen in Figure 3, the number of homeless youth attending school in the two largest counties in Northwest Arkansas has grown by nearly a third of the total K-12 homeless population since 2007. Representing 15 districts, some schools reported 0 K-12 homeless students while others reported more than 150. The majority of school-age homeless youth reported doubling up with friends and relatives (75.4%). The percentage of students doubling up with friends and relatives was similar in 2007 (80.6%).

Figure 4 shows the number of youth that were part of the family unit identified during the interview. In 2009, nearly half of the 90 youth identified as living in the family units (44) were under the age of 6. This number increased by more than half (52.5%) from 2007. Importantly, many of these children were not attending day care or enrolled in pre-K programs.

Methodological Note

The total number of homeless persons in Northwest Arkansas is based on three separate counts: a) a 24-hour PIT census of homeless adults and youth (under the age of 18) living with them; b) counts of homeless students provided by Benton and Washington County school districts; and c) an estimate of “invisible” homeless persons derived from interviews conducted in soup kitchens, food pantries and day centers.

Summing these three counts produced an estimate of 1,287 homeless persons in Benton and Washington Counties on February 5-6, 2009. Of this number: (a) 269 were adults and 90 accompanying youth; (b) 592* youth attending local schools along with their 286** estimated parents/guardians; and (c) 50 additional “invisible” homeless estimated from the soup kitchen, day center, food pantry count.

* The estimate of 592 homeless K-12 youth represents an adjustment of school district figures, calculated as the total number of homeless youth identified by school districts (n=638) minus those already counted during the PIT census (n=46).

** The estimate of 286 parents/guardians is the product of a two-step calculation. First, the total number of homeless students living without a parent or guardian is calculated. This value is estimated as 3.5 percent of all homeless students (n=20). The total number of these unaccompanied K-12 students is then subtracted from the total (592 - 20 = 572). The second step is to calculate the number of parents/guardians for these 572 students. This value is calculated using an estimated ratio of two students per parent, for an estimate of 286.

Details of the census and the current NWA homeless population and their needs will follow in a report that will be posted on the CFI website.