

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

2008 Regional Homeless Count – March 11th Midnight to Midnight

The Regional Steering Committee on Homelessness (RSCH) has hired SPARC BC (Social Planning and Research Council of BC) as the research consultant and volunteer coordinator for the Count. SPARC BC and their team of consultants coordinated the 2002 and 2005 Homeless Counts. Consultants with Infocus will again work to engage the Aboriginal community in the count. A Homeless Count Coordinating Committee (a task group of the RSCH) has been established to oversee the count.

1) Why do we need to count people who are homeless?

We need to know the number and demographic profile of people who are homeless so governments and service providers can plan and fund appropriate programs to address homelessness. By using a similar method as the 2005 count, we will be able to identify trends – such as: Has the situation improved, deteriorated or stayed the same?

2) Will the count include people who are homeless and not “on the street” – i.e. in emergency shelters?

Yes, the definition of a person who is homeless for the purposes of this count, includes a person who lacks a fixed, regular and/or adequate night time residence. Persons who are in emergency shelters, safe houses and transition houses (including hotels used by the Ministry of Employment and Income Assistance) are considered homeless.

3) How do we count people who are living rough?

We count people who are living rough by going to places where they may hang out, such as meal programs, bottle depots, drop-in centres, as well as parks, streets, ravines, and other locations where the homeless are known to gather. We conduct the count during the cold weather months when it is more likely that people who are homeless will be using emergency shelters or safe houses, as well as drop-in centres and meal programs.

4) How will the count capture sofa surfers?

As part of the daytime count, sofa surfers may be enumerated at bottle depots, drop-in centres, meal programs, panhandling, etc. In 2005, 24% of those enumerated as part of the daytime count reported that they were temporarily staying at someone else’s place. However, if someone is not using a service or walking the street on the day of the count, then they will likely not be enumerated. We will ask outreach workers to spread the word and urge individuals who are sofa surfing to report to designated locations to try to improve coverage of this group of homeless.

5) How about homeless youth?

Some homeless people are harder to find. We are working with youth, senior and Aboriginal agencies and consultants to maximize coverage. For example, it is hoped that by working with youth outreach workers in all parts of Metro Vancouver we will be able to identify youth who are homeless.

6) How many people are needed to help conduct the count?

We will need approximately 400 volunteers (200 teams of two) to help with the daytime and night time count across Metro Vancouver. In addition, many service providers and agencies will be asked to participate. For example, emergency shelters, safe houses and transition houses in Metro Vancouver will be asked to conduct the night time count.

7) Do I need any special skills to be a daytime interviewer?

As a member of a two-person team, volunteers can make an important contribution to the count if they have any of the following abilities and skills:

- Be accepting, compassionate and non-judgmental;
- Be comfortable with conducting one-on-one interviews;
- Be familiar and comfortable in dealing with people who are homeless or living in poverty;
- Have a sense of humour;
- Have an awareness of mental illnesses, physical disabilities and substance misuse;
- Have an awareness of the systemic causes of homelessness and poverty.
- Able to be on your feet for three to four hours at a time
- Have legible handwriting

Most importantly, we help ensure personal safety by requiring that all interviews be conducted with a partner.

Please note: we will have training sessions for all volunteers during the week of March 3-8. The 3 hour training session will cover how to approach homeless people, methodology, screening, how to interview and how to interpret the responses, safety issues and logistical issues. The training also includes a demonstration of an interview, practice time and feedback.

8) What is expected of an interviewer?

Interviewers will work in teams of two. Each team will include a person who is knowledgeable about where people who are homeless may be found, and who is experienced in working with this population and sensitive to their needs. **All**

persons working on the count will be required to attend one of the training sessions being held during the week of March 3-8. Interviewer shifts will be approximately 3 hours in length.

9) How long will the daytime count take?

The daytime count will begin at 5:00 am and conclude in the evening (around 10:00 pm). Times may vary by municipality or sub-region, depending on the services available in the evenings in the various municipalities.

10) What about safety during the count?

Interviewer safety is paramount. All interviewers will work in teams of two, led by a person with experience in working with people who are homeless and a general knowledge of the geographic area to be covered. Interviewers will be trained how to do the work safely and comfortably at the training sessions.

11) How will SPARC achieve an 'accurate' count of people who are homeless in Metro Vancouver?

All counts of people who are homeless are by their nature conservative estimates of the true extent of the problem. We strive to capture as many homeless persons during the count as possible. We are building on past experience with homeless counts, and the expertise of outreach workers and others in the community to best reach the homeless population. When we produce the report, we will explain the rigor of the methodology and let the reader know that the numbers are conservative and likely an undercount.

12) How do we cover an area the size of Metro Vancouver? It would take countless volunteers to visit every possible site.

We are trying to use a larger number of volunteer teams this time around. We are also trying to get more information on where people who are homeless congregate. To this end, we are consulting with local steering committees, outreach workers and service organizations.

If you are interested in volunteering for the Homeless Count, please contact Catrina Chisholm at 604-718-7751 or homelesscount@sparc.bc.ca.