

Focus Group #1

Date: 02/04/08

Greenville Community Shelter

1. How do you define homelessness?

P1: Not having roots in the community. No place to lay your head at night.

P2: No resources, out of resources.

2. How did you become homeless?

P4: A lot of homelessness comes from substance abuse. The public needs to know that they/we need to address substance abuse.

P6: Me and my son were in a domestic violence situation. Needed to leave the situation or stay under someone who was violent. He locked us out but it helped us in the end.

P2: Some don't have substance abuse or domestic violence, or victims of substance abuse. Was living with adult children who were substance abusers and did not feel safe. Fiancé' died couldn't pay the bills anymore. I had no resources, no place to go, that's how I ended up living with my children.

P5: "Not drugs, not alcohol, family doesn't have room for you and you have to leave. Sometimes it's the best thing".

P4: Mental illness plays a part. Been to shelter more than once. Shelter not set up for mental illness. Until the public is educated regarding mental illness it will continue to plague us.

P2: Shelter cares for your immediate needs but not long term needs.

3. How long have you been homeless or were you homeless?

P2: Homeless for 3 months on street and in shelter before moving to transitional housing.

P6: Homeless off and on for 9 years. This time about 3 months.

P4: Homeless off and on for the last 2 or 3 years.

P5: Homeless off and on for 5 years. Staying with friends and family, like a ball bouncing around from place to place.

P8: 54 days, first time homeless.

P1: Homeless since August of 2007 in street until November when I came to the shelter.

P3: Last 3 years.

4. How has homelessness affected the way you think about yourself?

P2: Lowers self esteem, don't feel a part of anything, useless.

P6: Scary, people think something is wrong with you. They don't realize they miss 2 paychecks and it could be them.

P4: 1st time was scary, shameful, now I use shelter for what it's for. Try to feel good about myself and positive.

P2: Created a "supreme sense of failure". Did what I needed to survive.

5. Thinking back to when you first became homeless, what would it have taken to prevent it?

P4: If I had known about substance abuse and what it would cause me to do I would never pick it up. My addiction took precedence over everything: bills, food, etc. I was willing to sleep under bridges as long as I had my drugs.

P2: Been more independent of fiancé. He was 41 when he died. I worked part time and he was the main supporter. I could not take care of bills on my income. Didn't understand finances.

P6: If I had listened to myself and not others. I knew what I wanted but I still listened to family's advice. I was living outside of NC and my family convinced me to come here. When I got here they dropped me off at the shelter and didn't come back.

P5: If I'd listened to my family and left my boyfriend I would have been better off. When I left that's when I became homeless.

P1: Nothing would have stopped me. "If you have a mansion and a shack with crack in it I'd pick the shack".

6. What do you need to maintain a home/housing?

P1: Need good education and good job. I'm in my 1st semester working on a 2 year degree. "I'm going to get a job and a house with a white picket fence".

P4: Aware I'm an addict and have a mental illness. I found out that I'm bi-polar. It took me a long time to find out why I couldn't keep a job. I accept that I'm a drug addict, an alcoholic and bi-polar. I need to stay drug free and take my medication.

P2: Education and a job. I was a mother and a wife and not much of anything else. I need financial counseling and to be able to clean up my credit.

P6: Education, better paying job, budgeting classes. I'm hard on myself so I need people around that will give me encouragement. I do better with encouragement.

7. What would you do if you had unlimited resources and could end homelessness?

P1: Build place where people could live and contribute to the community. Homelessness is a cycle and you have to stop the cycle. Build a place to train people, vocational training. Sleep there, stay there for about 6 months then move to transitional housing.

P2: Provide housing then give people an education: parenting, financial, etc.

P4: Find out what's causing the homelessness like substance abuse, domestic violence, etc. Unfortunately some people would continue to choose to be homeless.

P5: Build large enough shelter and transitional housing facility.

(Group seemed unsure of "unlimited resources", didn't seem to be able to comprehend it.)

P2: Shelters not answer, people need own place then give support: grief counseling, NA, etc.

P6: Agree with P2 and also take one day at a time.

(Overall the group felt that people needed budgeting courses and financial counseling.)

P3: Get people on their feet but it are up to them to stay there. Give them a place to stay, help them get a job, save their money.

P8: Get back on their feet, keep in mind my home, keeping my home, focus on savings.

8. What effect has homelessness had on your children?

P6: My son loves people. He says he'll be glad to go home but he'll miss everyone at the shelter. Moving from domestic violence situation his grades have improved. He's done better than I have.

P2: My children are grown – teen sons stay with their dad and I never told them that I'm homeless.

P5: Stressed them because they've had to accommodate me. Daughter feels it the most. My son says it stresses my daughter in-law too.

9. Many experts think estimates of the numbers who are homeless are not accurate because they do not include people who are doubling up with relatives or friends. Did you ever double up? Do you know others who have?

P2: Stayed with my children and with friends. Both were bad. Some you don't know well enough to stay with and others you know too well.

P6: Stayed with my ex mother in-law twice and with friends.

P5: Stayed with my children, friends, and relatives.

P4: Mom, brother, niece, sister. A lot of people share housing.

P3: Stayed with my daughter until she kicked me out.

P2: The numbers are way off. Doubled up people don't consider themselves homeless.

P1: Some men have a lot of girlfriends; make one mad move to the next one. You have a bag here, pair of pants there, etc.

P4: P2 is right. For a long time I didn't think I was homeless. My mom was the one who told me I was homeless.

10. What three things should Pitt County do to end homelessness?

P4: Lived in Farmville and never heard of NA. Substance abuse was taboo, nobody talked about it. We need resources, didn't have access to it. You never hear about it in small towns until it's a drug related robbery on the news. People need education. Substance abuse is a huge issue. I didn't know I could go to Walter B. Jones.

P2: Educate the community about the homeless situation; most people are not aware that we're here. The small outlying towns have no resources. The volunteer fire department paid a cab for me to come to Greenville from Grimesland. Most of us are willing to do our part we just need some help. The transitional housing program here is a great program just not enough space.

P6: Large transitional housing in western part of the state, work at the place (Salvation Army funded?). Job training. It's hard to find a job. Bad credit hurts/keeps you from getting an apartment.

P4: Community does not see the problem until it's at their front door.

P6: Homelessness is not always caused by drugs. We're not horrible, dirty people. We need to educate the community. People think homeless people are not dependable.

P5: I've gone to employers, staffing groups, called calls, knocked on doors but my resume' shows my address as a homeless shelter, it ostracizes you. Employers need to know that not everyone runs after they receive their first paycheck.

P2: Businesses should partner with the county to give jobs to people with bad credit, criminal records and shelter address. It took me one hour to convince the manager at taco Bell to hire me and I'd be dependable even though I lived at the shelter.

P4: Affordable housing. Strain of a lot of bills makes you relapse. Boarded up houses means drugs. Need to tear them down.

P2: Open up resources to the community such as grief counseling, domestic violence, legal aid, substance abuse resources. Make resources accessible to the homeless.