

# Unhoused Survey Results

## Introduction

In early 2024, the South Central Housing Network began work to better understand the demographics of people experiencing homelessness in Bloomington. In particular, the Housing Network and other local leaders were interested to learn more about the inflow of people into the local homelessness response system in order to lead system improvement efforts and minimize the number of people impacted by homelessness. One step to understanding inflow is understanding what portion of people experiencing homelessness are from this region and what portion come from somewhere else in Indiana or other states.

To begin to answer this question, the Housing Network conducted a survey of households experiencing homelessness on May 13, 2024.

## Executive Summary

Our nation is in a housing crisis. One in four American households are cost burdened, spending more than half of their income on housing. Locally, Monroe County is the least affordable county to live in all of Indiana. The Indiana Uplands 2024 Housing Study found that over half of Monroe County residents are cost burdened. Given this, it should not be surprising that a large number individuals and families experience homelessness in our community each year. This report is intended to help us better understand the inflow of people into our homelessness response system.

The survey found that a majority of households (61%) were from Monroe County, 8% were from our region's coverage area, and 31% were from another Indiana region or state. People came for a variety of reasons. A quarter of respondents indicated that they had relocated to Bloomington from outside our region during an episode of homelessness in the past two years, and more than half of respondents who had relocated to Monroe County at any time had done so during an episode of homelessness.

Only a small portion of households experiencing homelessness in Bloomington relocate here from outside our region during an episode of homelessness, but when they do, they are not likely to quickly achieve housing stability. These results suggest the need to investigate ways to help individuals and families address their homelessness in their home communities when it is safe to do so.

## Methodology

The May 13, 2024 survey was conducted by Monroe County members of the South Central Housing Network, including New Hope for Families, Beacon, Wheeler Mission, HealthNet, Centerstone, and Middle Way House. Staff conducted paper surveys with a series of questions. The survey included the following questions:

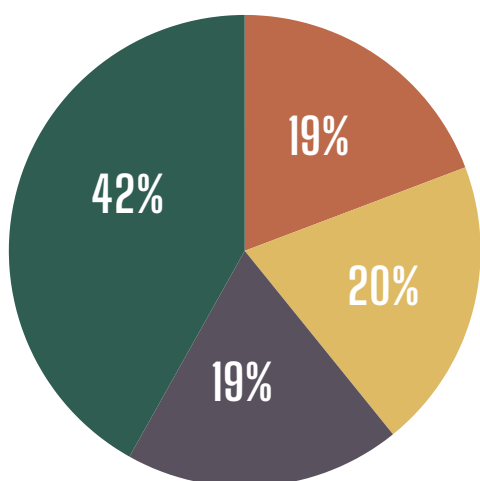
- Where did you sleep last night?
- How long have you been in Bloomington/Monroe County?
- What brought you to Bloomington?
- Where were you before you came to Bloomington?
- If you had the opportunity to return to the place you were before Bloomington, would you like to? Why or why not?

Shelter staff surveyed people in shelter. Case managers from several agencies organized to survey unsheltered individuals. The responses were given verbally, and the surveyor took note of the interviewee's responses. Interviewees received incentives for participation. Heading Home staff compiled, analyzed, and presented the data collected.

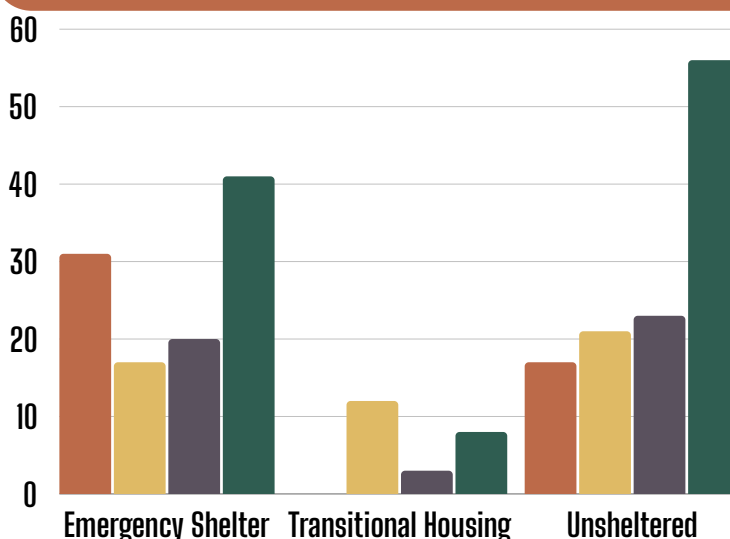
## Results

A total of 249 heads of households were interviewed. Of those surveyed, 23 reported sleeping in transitional housing, 109 reported sleeping in shelter, and 117 reported sleeping outdoors (including sleeping in vehicles).

Length of time in Monroe County



Where did you sleep last night?



The results of the survey were organized based on length of time in Bloomington.

2 to 10 years

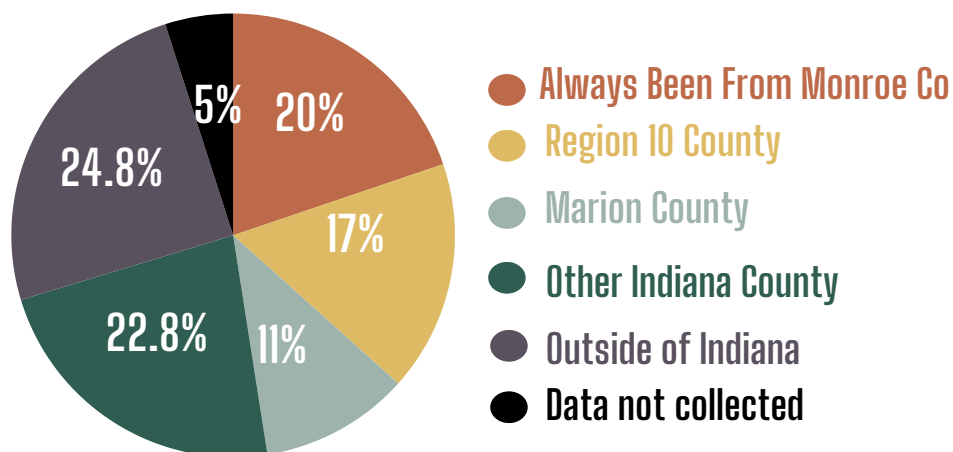
6 months to 2 years

10+ years

## Results

This survey attempted to provide insight into the demographics of unhoused individuals and how long they've been in Monroe County. Monroe County emergency shelters (excluding Wheeler Mission) receive funding from the Indiana Housing & Community Development Authority (IHCDA). IHCDA has divided Indiana into regions to govern services. Monroe County falls into Region 10.

### Where were you before you came to Bloomington?

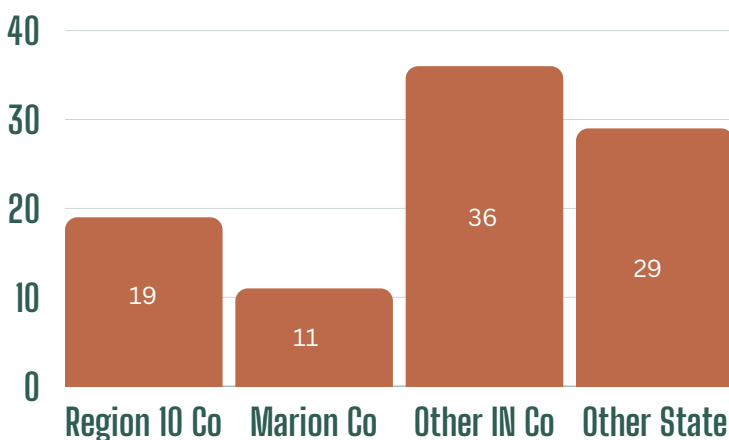


### Region 10 Counties

Monroe  
Morgan  
Lawrence  
Greene  
Martin  
Owen

The chart above shows survey results for the full unhoused population. The chart below shows survey results for those who have been in Monroe County less than 2 years.

### Less-than-2-year data

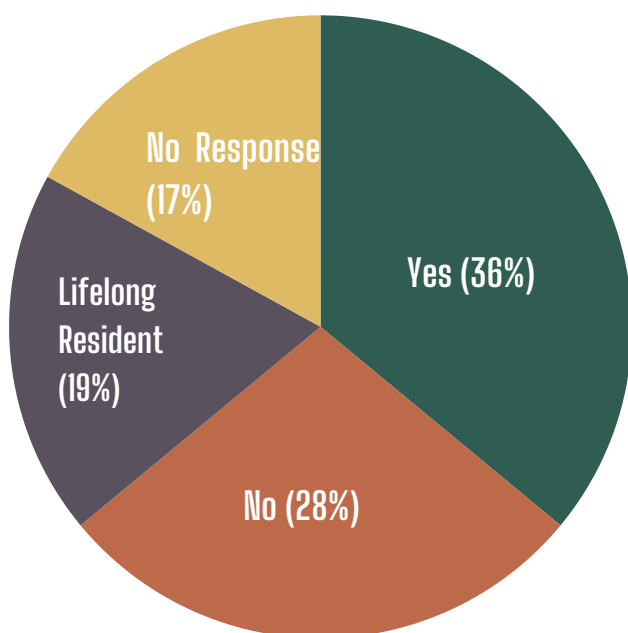


Of the 249 households surveyed, 98 households reported being in Monroe County less than 2 years.

## Results

To better understand the demographics of those entering the local homelessness response system, surveyors were asked to determine whether or not interviewees were homeless when they arrived in Bloomington. The findings are below.

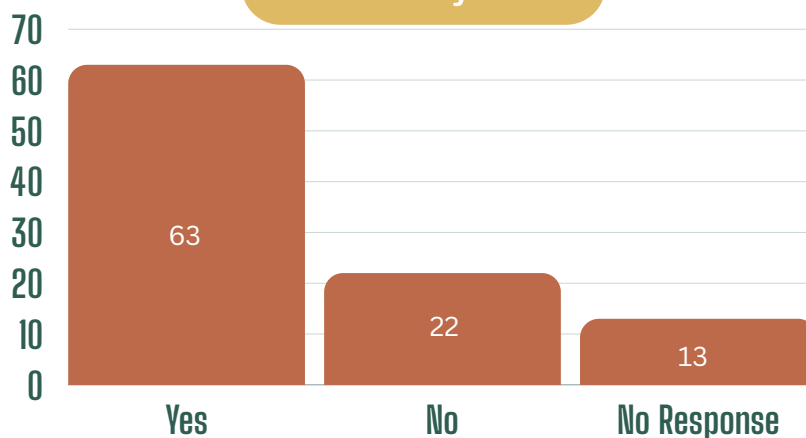
Were you homeless when you arrived here?



The chart on the left reflects survey results for the full population surveyed.

The chart on the right reflects survey results for those who reported being in Monroe County for less than 2 years.

Less-than-2-year data

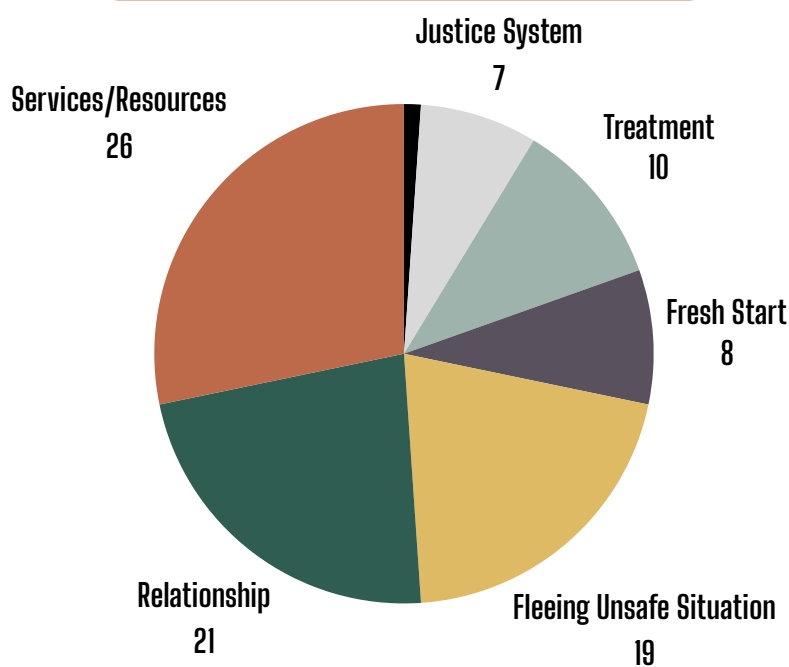


## Important Note About Results

The results on this page focus on people who reported being in Bloomington less than 2 years. The South Central Housing Network decided to focus on that population to better understand the demographics of those newly inflowing into Monroe County's homeless response system.

Of the 249 heads of households surveyed, 98 have been in Monroe County less than 2 years. Here are the results of their survey responses. The following chart breaks down what brought households to Monroe County. Numbers represent total households.

### What brought you to Monroe County?



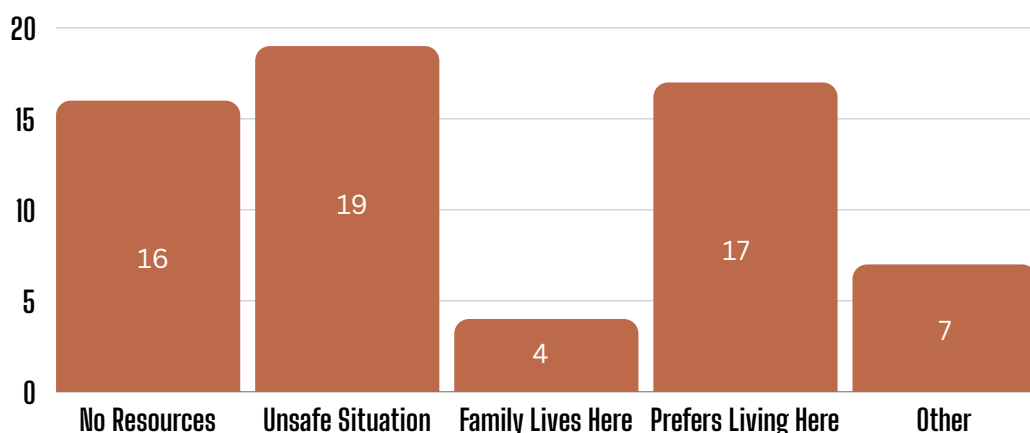
**Note:** Relationship includes those who reported coming to Bloomington for family, friends, or a romantic relationship.

**Note:** Unsafe situation includes those who reported fleeing domestic violence, discrimination, or other unsafe situations.

When asked if the interviewee would like to return to the place they were before coming to Bloomington:

- 62 reported no
- 23 reported yes
- 3 people didn't answer this question.

### If you don't want to return, why not?



## Analysis

Like the general population of Bloomington and Monroe County, people experiencing homelessness come from a variety of places around the state and around the country. Some arrived just a few days ago, and some have been here for more than 20 years. Like many of us, they were drawn to Bloomington's professional and educational opportunities, to friends and family who live here, to the promise of a new start in a thriving small city, and to our supportive and welcoming community.

The survey revealed that the majority of households experiencing homelessness in our community (61%) have lived in Monroe County for more than two years. For the purposes of this survey, we considered that people who have been in our community for more than two years are likely best served in place. Of the remaining 98 households, 19 were from other counties in our region, and 79 came to Monroe County from another Indiana county or a different state. These households represent nearly one in three impacted by homelessness in our community.

Overall, 19% of heads of household identified as lifelong residents, while 64% moved here at some point in time, and 16% declined to answer the question. Of the 159 respondents who moved here at some point and indicated whether they were homeless at that time, a slight majority (89) were homeless when they came to Monroe County, while 70 were housed when they arrived here and subsequently became homeless. When we look at households who have been here less than 2 years, we see that just over one in five households (22%) was housed when they arrived here, while nearly two thirds (64%) relocated to Monroe County during an episode of homelessness. This indicates that many people who come to our community during an episode of homelessness are likely to either remain homeless for a period of months or years or to experience an additional episode of homelessness while they are living here. This is unsurprising given the general lack of affordable housing for low-income households.

Understanding where unhoused households are from is important for two reasons. First and most importantly, recognized best practice instructs that people experiencing homelessness are best served in their home community and that during an episode of homelessness is not an opportune time to relocate for a fresh start unless housing is available. Secondly, though we have not seen a large increase the rate homelessness in our community, we have seen a dramatic increase in the number of people sleeping unsheltered. The number of affordable housing units for the lowest income households in our community is woefully deficient to meet the demand, and our homeless response system is overwhelmed. As a result, we are unable to meet the needs of unhoused people in our community.

To address these concerns and best serve as many unhoused people as possible, we must address both the outflow from and the inflow to our homelessness response system. One tool at our disposal is to reimagine the way we prioritize shelter services based on regional residency.

## Conclusion

Though it can be tempting to conflate prevalence of homelessness with other public health challenges or attribute it to importation of households in crisis, we know that at its root homelessness is a housing problem. Public health challenges can be attributed to housing affordability as much as the inverse. We are experiencing a serious affordability crisis. It is difficult to afford to live in Bloomington or Monroe County, and it is easy for rent-burdened households to fall into homelessness. Further, because affordable housing is so scarce, it is difficult for a household experiencing homelessness to quickly move back to stability. It is not surprising, then, that a high number of local families and individuals experience homelessness each year. The most important thing our community can do to address this is increase the supply of attainable housing for low-income households.

This survey revealed that the majority of people impacted by homeless in our community have lived here for at least two years, but nearly one third of respondents (31%) relocated to Monroe County from outside our region in the recent past, including 63 households who relocated to Bloomington from outside our region during an episode of homelessness. Unfortunately, many people who relocate to Bloomington during an episode of homelessness are likely to remain homeless for an extended time following their arrival or to experience an additional episode of homelessness.

In order to best serve those individuals and all households impacted by homelessness in our community and in light of the scarcity of affordable housing in our community, we should consider whether some households should be encouraged to return to their home community where more resources may be available to them rather than seek services in Monroe County. Our community should explore potential tools to help individuals experiencing homelessness address their homelessness in their own community including increased funding for diversion and reunification as well as investigating residency guidelines.

Importantly, a significant portion of people who relocated to our community during an episode of homelessness did so to flee domestic violence or another unsafe situation. In these cases, it is best practice to serve households where they can be safe from harm, even when that involves relocation. We do not recommend refusing services to these households but rather serving them in alignment with the unique guidelines for those who are fleeing domestic violence or discrimination.

In order to understand how these populations evolve over time, the Housing Network intends to conduct additional surveys of unhoused residents in the upcoming years, amending the survey as necessary to collect data that is true and useful to serving our unhoused neighbors with dignity and respect and helping them move through homelessness to lasting stability.