Human Services

Do homeless people come here for our services?

Issue Brief, April 2015

Where are homeless people in Boulder from?

A concern often raised about homelessness in Boulder is whether local homeless services attract people to the city. While the picture is not complete, this issue brief explains what we know about homeless migration based on currently available data.

Point in Time Survey

Each January, communities across the country conduct the Point in Time (PIT) survey of their homeless populations to better understand characteristics of homelessness. While local PIT data indicate that people experiencing homelessness are highly mobile, it does not indicate that Boulder experiences a higher rate of migration than the Denver Metro Region overall. In 2014, 54 percent of the people surveyed by the PIT in Boulder County listed Boulder County as their last permanent residence. This is a higher residency rate than most other counties in the region. The number of homeless and proportion of homeless residents in each county are highlighted in Figure 1.

Figure 1: % Homeless who are local per county, Jan. 2014 PIT

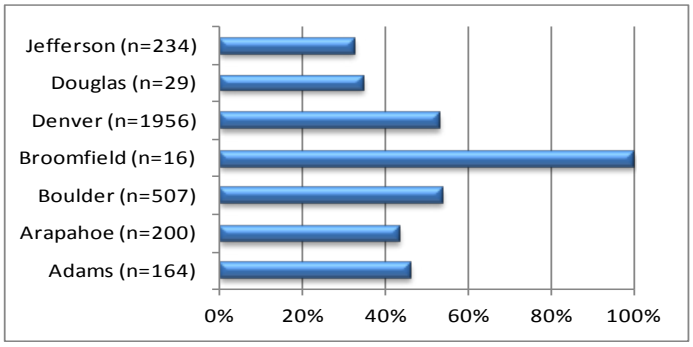

Figure 2: County of last permanent residence for homeless in Boulder, Jan. 2014 PIT (n=507)

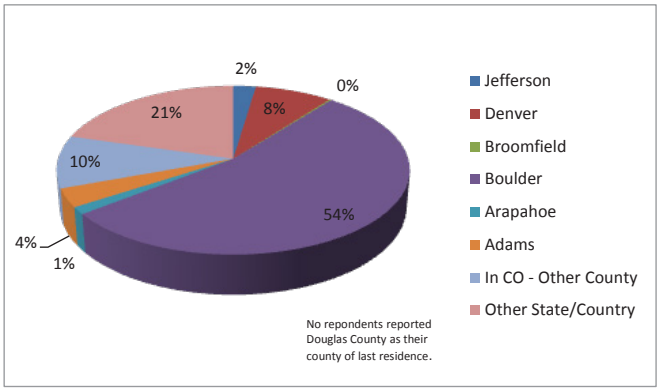

Figure 2 shows last permanent residence responses of homeless in Boulder County. In 2014, more than half of PIT participants in Boulder County reported Boulder County as their last permanent residence, with an additional quarter coming from elsewhere in Colorado.

Services in Denver Compared to Boulder

Denver offers some services that Boulder does not, including year-round shelter and more shelters serving specialized populations such as women. In addition, Denver has many more service providers than Boulder. People evaluating where to go in the region based on services may prefer Denver to Boulder for this reason.

Boulder Service Provider Data

During summer 2013, homeless service providers and city staff walked the central Boulder Creek/Municipal Campus area on 16 different days, counting the number of potentially homeless people and those known to be users of local homeless services. The median percentage known was 22 percent. There was also a high degree of turnover among the "unknown" persons in the area between each walk, which may

Chart 1: Summary PIT Data for Denver Region and Peer Cities, 2013

City	Total Population	Total Homeless Population	Total Homeless as % of Total Population
Denver Region:			
Denver	649,495	4,904	0.76
Aurora	345,803	661	0.19
Boulder	103,166	748	0.73
Lafayette	26,784	259	0.97
Longmont	89,919	1,180	1.31
Peer Cities:			
Berkeley, CA	116,768	808	0.69
Madison, WI	243,344	732	0.3
Norman, OK	118,197	368	0.31
Santa Barbara, CA	90,412	946	1.05
Santa Monica, CA	92,472	780	0.84

indicate a high turnover in the homeless population not engaging in services.

Boulder Shelter for the Homeless reports that roughly half of its annual clients stay for seven or fewer nights, and approximately a quarter stay only one night. This information suggests that many people may "pass through" Boulder and use few or no services, or a high transient population.

Per-capita Homeless Population

A 2013 comparison of homeless populations as a percentage of overall population in other cities (Chart 1) suggests that many cities have comparable or higher per-capita homeless rates than Boulder.

Bridge House Resource Center Data

In October 2012, the Bridge House Resource Center was opened to help people experiencing homelessness in Boulder attain self sufficiency by connecting homeless adults with needed services. (Other homeless service providers in the city assist youth and families.) An informal survey asked Resource Center clients why they came to Boulder if they came after becoming homeless. The top six responses were :

- To find employment - 16%
- It's beautiful here - 10%
- It's safer for me here - 8%
- People are friendlier here - 8%
- I have friends/family here - 7%
- Good shelter services for homeless people - 7%

Summary

Although some people may come to Boulder for homeless services, the available information does not suggest that people are coming in significant numbers for this reason.

Questions?

This issue brief is one of a series of briefs produced by the City of Boulder Human Services Department to answer frequently asked questions and provide information about homelessness to the Boulder community. Contact Wendy Schwartz, Human Services Planning and Program Development Manager, at schwartzw@bouldercolorado.gov with comments or questions.

References

1. 2014 Point in Time Count. *Metro Denver Homeless Initiative.* Data collected January 27th-28th, 2014. http://mdhi.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/PIT-report-2014-6-17.pdf

2. Bridge House Resource Center Intake Survey. *Bridge House Resource Center.*

3. 2013 Point in Time Count. January 2013. Collected from various data sources.