

# Times-Republican

## Marshalltown leaders say homeless count of one person inaccurate



LAURIE SKRIVAN/ST. LOUIS POST-DISPATCH VIA AP - A homeless camp is shown in January in St. Louis.

Local leaders say a recent homeless count of only one person doesn't accurately portray how much the issue impacts Marshalltown.

*"Most of the homeless folks we encounter do not fit the stereotypical definitions of living outside in camps. The folks we encounter are folks*

*who bounce place to place, stay in vehicles or any place they can find. They have a network of people who might help them occasionally for a night or two, but they have no permanent housing solutions,”* Marshalltown Police Department Chief Mike Tupper said.

Those people don't make the official count the government uses.

Several local social welfare agencies participated in the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development sponsored Point-in-Time count of sheltered and unsheltered homeless persons on a single day — Feb. 6.

*“We had volunteers go out and physically go to places where we have identified as where homeless have lived and we didn't find any,”* House of Compassion Director March Runner said. *“And we didn't get anyone to sign up with us as being homeless.”*



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO - During the 2018 Point in Time count, YSS of Marshall County Director David Hicks took this photo underneath a property at Second Street and Main Street, looking down the exterior stairs. A couple had been squatting there for a period of time.

YSS of Marshall County, the Salvation Army and Marshalltown Police Department reported similar findings.

*“We had one person in the street count. We know of two who were living in their van a few days prior, but had to move on and we couldn’t find them,”* YSS Director David Hicks said. *“The first count date was postponed by the state due to weather. The rescheduled date also had bad weather, which made it challenging for us. I would presume those who needed shelter, found it somehow. If the state asked us to do the count in the summer, which is rare, I imagine the count result would be different. Our available transitional living apartment beds were full that night.”*

MPD Captain Chris Jones said the police department located one homeless individual that day.

### **HUD defines homelessness as:**

- Individual or family who lacks a fixed, regular and adequate nighttime residence, such as a nighttime residence that is a public or private place not meant for human habitation



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO - During the 2018 Point in Time count, YSS of Marshall County Transitional Living Case Manager Sam Fox took this photo of tents behind Walmart, to the north. The inhabitants were not there at the time.

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- Is living in a publicly or privately operated shelter designated to provide temporary living arrangements (including congregate shelters, transitional housing and hotels and motels paid for by charitable organizations or by federal, state and local government programs)
- Is exiting an institution where the person resided for 90 days or less and who resided in an emergency shelter or place not meant for human habitation immediately before entering that institution

Hicks said HUD's guidelines do not reflect how he and similar agencies view homelessness.

*"We tend to see those who are sleeping on a buddy's couch, sharing floor space where they can and often in dangerous circumstances trading favors for a place to live,"* Hicks said.

The Salvation Army reported zero homeless persons on the day of the count.

*"We participated in the count, although we don't have to because we receive no federal funding,"* Captain Pam Kasten said. *"(The count) is not an accurate representation of what is really going on in the community. That day the weather didn't cooperate and we didn't have many people even visit us."*

As of January 2017, Iowa had an estimated 2,756 people experiencing homelessness, as reported by Continuums of Care to HUD. Statistics showed that 382 were family households, 171 were veterans, 140 were unaccompanied young adults (aged 18-24) and 199 were individuals experiencing chronic homelessness. Data reported by public schools, and reported to the U.S. Department of Education during the 2016-2017 school year, revealed that Iowa had an estimated youth and children homeless population of 6,774 with 104 students still unsheltered. Of students who had a nighttime residence, 1,410 were in shelters, 507 were in

hotels/motels and 4,753 were doubled up, according to information obtained from the United States Interagency Council on Homelessness.

Runner said that while the House of Compassion doesn't receive federal dollars, the data communities send in gets scored and can influence the dollar amount Continuums of Care receives locally.

Hicks said YSS of Marshall County receives HUD funding for its transitional living apartments, which are almost always full, often with a wait list.

*"If our apartments were empty that night, then we could see some potential cuts down the road," he said. "We've been doing the Point-in-Time count for almost 20 years now and haven't seen any cuts based on our street count being 'low.'"*

Hicks said it is hard to determine the exact total of homeless people living in Marshalltown.

*"The hidden homeless numbers are likely significant, especially those displaced and living with friends after the tornado, those sharing floor space or sleeping on couches or families living out of a hotel," he said. "Over the years, we've seen young women and their children victimized as they are just trying to find a place to stay. This winter season has been especially hard, which often creates victims out of dire circumstances."*

Tupper said his officers have even put people up for the night in area hotels on their own dime.

*"The challenge for our community is that these folks need services that are generally in short supply," Tupper said. "They struggle to find safe housing and regular meals they can count on. Some of these folks struggle with addiction or mental illness. Many are just like you and me but they fell on hard times and are struggling to recover financially or they cannot find steady, full-time employment."*

Kasten said despite the low Point-in-Time count, the Salvation Army and the other agencies will not skip a beat in their services. The Salvation Army

provides people with food and assistance with paying rent and utilities.

In 2018, the House of Compassion served 16,000 evening meals and averages 1,300 people each month shopping in its supply closet.

*“We very much have a homeless population in Marshalltown and a housing problem, so identifying those people on an ongoing basis is important so we can work together as a community,”* Kasten said.

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