

# *Homelessness in the Fox Cities: Reflections from the Shelters and the Streets*



Final Report to Fox Cities Housing Coalition  
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Fox Cities Housing Coalition

A coalition of housing and housing-related providers



Note: Cover photos were taken by unhoused individuals who participated in the study discussed the following report

## INTRODUCTION

The Fox Cities Housing Coalition consists of 26 agencies in the Fox Cities, Wisconsin with goals including building awareness of housing issues, reducing duplication of services, and identifying and addressing gaps in services. After a growing concern over not having systematically looked at the clients' perspectives about the various agencies' services, the coalition reached out to social work professor Dr. James Brown formerly from the University of Wisconsin Oshkosh, now Indiana University, Bloomington, and a research team was developed with the purposes of identifying service gaps and barriers that keep unhoused<sup>1</sup> people from moving into permanent supportive housing, what services unhoused people experience as helpful in moving individuals into secure housing, and identifying areas where services are duplicated, under-utilized or not offered. It is important to know if current programs and policies of governmental, social services and religious-affiliated organizations are effectively reducing the amount of people in need of these services in order to lessen the economic, psychological and inter-personal burdens of accommodating this lower class status.

A team of eight undergraduate social work and sociology students, supervised by Dr. Brown and sociology professor Dr. Paul Van Auken, set out to help shed additional light upon these issues, starting in the spring semester in 2013. After meeting with coalition leaders—Jerome Martin and John Weyenberg in particular—to discuss project parameters, the students started by researching what methods previous studies have used to learn more in this regard and what their work uncovered.

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<sup>1</sup> In his now classic ethnography, *Sidewalk*, sociologist Mitchell Duneier advocates the use of this term instead of the more stigmatizing "homeless."

## **BACKGROUND AND LITERATURE REVIEW**

Homelessness in our country has been a persistent issue despite various efforts in our history to combat it. “At the beginning of the twenty first century there were up to two-million people homeless in any given year” (Kelly 2001, as cited in Klitzing, 2004, p. 483). Women, men, and children can all be affected by homelessness, and this problem continues to exist throughout Wisconsin and the nation.

According to the National Alliance to End Homelessness (2013), for the years 2011-2012, “The national rate of homelessness was 20 homeless people per 10,000 people in the general population. The rate for veterans was 29 homeless veterans per 10,000 veterans in the general population” (p. 3). Recent trends suggest a decrease in the number of unhoused people in the U.S., with national data showing 763,010 individuals being considered homeless in 2005, with declined significantly to 688,750 in 2012, per statistics provided from *The State of Homelessness* report. These numbers may be significantly lower then actual numbers since the data was collected using point-in-time estimates which are, arguably, imperfect due to the inability to count every homeless individual in a given area. For example, the National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty (2012) reported that in 2006 that over 3 million individuals experience homelessness at some point each year. Wisconsin alone had 23,236 homeless individuals in 2012, according to the Wisconsin Department of Administration (2013), and to target the homeless population further, 1,125 individuals who identified as homeless utilized services in the Fox Valley in the same year, according to the Wisconsin Service Point Information.

It is difficult to accurately identify the number of individuals in America experiencing homelessness for many reasons. These reasons include people moving in and out of shelters or

transitional living, people living at friend's houses and moving from couch to couch, or people living on the streets who do not always appear to be homeless. Interestingly, many people facing homelessness do not want to associate with other homeless individuals. Chamberlain and Johnson (2011) used two agency databases to gain information on adult homelessness (N=3941). They used this information to "form five ideal typical pathways into adult homelessness" which included housing crisis, family breakdown, substance abuse, mental health, and youth to adult (Chamberlain and Johnson, 2011, p.60). These pathways were used to "draw attention to structural and cultural factors that may limit the opportunities that people have" (Chamberlain and Johnson, 2011, p. 61). They also "go some way towards explaining why some people remain homeless for longer than others" (Chamberlain and Johnson, 2011, p. 74). They explain that the social adaptation thesis, which "suggests that homeless people form friendships with other homeless people who teach them strategies to survive homelessness" does not explain the housing crisis and family breakdown pathways (Chamberlain and Johnson, 2011, p. 62). In fact, individuals on these pathways did not want to identify as homeless because of the stigma in the wider society, and they often expressed stereotypes against others who were homeless (Chamberlain and Johnson, 2011, p. 69).

Recent economic instability also seems to have created a larger a larger underclass of formerly middle-class people who now put more demand on the system for affordable housing according to this prominent author (Hodgetts, et al. 2012). While many people in our modern society view homelessness as an ever-present reality, such as Currie (2006), others propose that is only natural that our capitalistic society somehow defines life as a game; and whereas, our democracy states that all are equal, different rules actually apply to different people (Shorris 2012:17). This attitude is adopted by unhoused people themselves while attempting to deny they are in this social class, trying to avoid the stigma of homelessness in our society (Belcher and

DeForce 2012). Our research produced similar results and additional findings that will hopefully be interesting and useful to the Coalition.<sup>2</sup>

## **METHODS**

### *Qualitative Research*

Our research utilized participant-driven photo elicitation (PDPE) and follow up interviews with homeless participants. The simplest definition of photo-elicitation is provided by Harper (2002), “Photo elicitation is based on the simple idea of inserting a photograph into a research interview” (p. 13). A participation-driven (Van Auken, Stewart, and Frisvoll 2010) version of the method, in which participants take the photos and then are interviewed about them, was selected for our study because, “It can be helpful in understanding everyday events that might be difficult for some people to articulate. It can also be used to provide an inside look at people's worlds or reality” (Klitzing, 2004, p.488).

PDPE allows the individual being researched to share their knowledge and view of the world because they are, in fact, the only expert regarding their life and perspectives on the topics of interest. As described by Packard (2008), the intention behind this form of research is to improve the lives of the research participants “by gathering information and generating knowledge” (p. 69) that may lead to living conditions. Participatory visual research methods also attempt to decrease the power differential between a researcher and the individual being researched (Packard, 2008, p. 63) and have even been shown to empower participants to take action to improve their lives or the quality of life in their community (Van Auken, Stewart, and Frisvoll 2010).

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<sup>2</sup> It should be stressed that while the professors provided training and supervision to the students, and assisted in the analysis and in compiling and editing this report, the vast majority of work done for this project was by undergraduate students with limited training or experience in such projects. They volunteered to participate in this study, receiving neither academic credit nor monetary compensation, precisely because they wanted to gain experience in this regard were interested in helping to address the problem of homelessness in this area in some way.

This approach permits low-income people to get involved in the construction of strategies that could signify an improvement of their quality of life, allowing them to become empowered, and not just verbal reporters but illustrators to their lived-experiences regarding homelessness services. This method provides a realistic and viable way of collecting the direct experiences of what homeless participants face everyday (Luna Hernández, 2009).

### *Recruitment*

Have you been **unhoused** or in need of **housing assistance** within the last year?

# PARTICIPANTS NEEDED

We would like to hear about your experience.

**Participants will be offered gift cards for their contributions.**

If you are interested in participating, **please contact**

**920.252.6091 or**  
**[uwohousingproject@gmail.com](mailto:uwohousingproject@gmail.com)**

**Participants must be:**

- 18 years or older
- able to take photos with a disposable camera (provided)
- willing to provide an interview describing the pictures with researchers

**Participants will receive:**

- A camera with instructions on what types of photos are needed for the research study.
- Printed copies of the photos
- Gift cards at the beginning and end of the process

Figure 1. Project recruitment poster.

After the study was approved by the Institutional Review Board for the study of human subjects at UW Oshkosh, recruitment of participants began. Recruitment was purposeful and

advertised by hanging posters that were put up at bus stops, public library, and at homeless service provider buildings. Participants pulled a tab with a phone number off a poster and called a phone number linked to a student researcher. A total of 36 participants communicated interest and were contacted by a researcher after being screened by a professional service provider employed by one of the Coalition member agencies, to ensure that each participant was able to provide informed consent and did not have mental health or other challenges that would preclude him or her from participating.

The researcher then met with the participant and had him or her sign an informed consent form to participate. Participants were given a disposable camera in order to take pictures of resources that help them and barriers to securing housing, and were given a small gift card for their participation, including a \$5 card for simply coming to the informational meeting.



Figure 2. Box created by students to collect cameras at Harmony Café

## *Interviews*

Prior to conducting interviews, researchers were trained by the supervising professors in the PDPE method, in interviewing techniques, and to identify and minimize his or her own preconceived ideas or biases.

Nineteen interviews were scheduled, but because of change of address, no car, phone number being disconnected etc., eight interviews were actually conducted by social work and sociology students with unhoused individuals. They were conducted in private locations in the Fox Valley to help establish rapport and maintain confidentiality. At this second meeting, the research team meeting with them would give them a copy of their pictures for their own use and also an additional \$15.00 gift certificate for Harmony Café.

It should be stressed that while there was a systematic and well-organized plan in place for conducting this research, the team experienced significant challenges in completing the work. Some were internal in origin, as it proved to be difficult to coordinate the work of eight students based in Oshkosh, with their own full schedules and who lived in different places, and in trying to track down and interview a hard-to-reach population in other cities. Participants were understandably busy with their day-to-day struggles and had numerous barriers to participation, including inconsistent access to telephones and email.

According to Beraux (1981), what the qualitative researcher seeks is “saturation of knowledge” (p. 370). While there is no minimum or set number of interviews that will produce valid qualitative data, for homogeneous samples, 12-15 interviews are often seen as sufficient to produce saturation. One qualitative researcher recently explained the concept of saturation in this way: “By (say) the fifteenth interview, the researcher recognises patterns in the interviewees’ experiences. More interviews confirm what the researcher has already sensed” (Box

2014:para.4). We interviewed a total of 8 people, which may not have produced saturation, but did yield rich data.

The goal in qualitative research is not to gather data on a large sample of people to perform statistical analysis and attempt to generalize to an entire population of some sort, but rather to gather rich, in-depth, detailed information about a smaller group from a population of interest, to reveal common narratives about experiences and perspectives that can help to explain social phenomena, suggest possible causes and solutions to problems, and simply gather interesting and useful stories about people's lives.

As is often the case with qualitative research, the sample is not fully representative of the population of interest. Further, the relatively small size of the sample and the convenience (not random) sampling used to recruit them limits the generalizability of the data. All research is limited to a particular frame of reference, however, and it is important to simply be clear about its limitations.

We hoped to interview more people, but our participants represented a segment of the local unhoused population and their interesting stories and insights represent valid data that should be interesting and useful to the Fox Cities Housing Coalition. Students developed the photographs from the cameras provided by the Fox Cities Housing Coalition. A team of two students met with each participant. Demographic information was gathered from each participant prior to the start of the interview. The sample was comprised of seven males and one female, and a total of three veterans. A significant number of participants were divorced and all had experienced economic dislocation. Multiple participants suffered from different types of disabilities.

Each interview was recorded and then transcribed by researchers word for word. Interviews were in-depth and semi-structured, being based upon core questions such as: What

gets in your way of your housing goals? What has been helpful during your time seeking secure housing? Because they were also semi-structured, however, researchers follow-up and probing questions to gather additional information (e.g., “I heard you say X earlier, but now I hear you say it’s Y. Can you help me understand what happened?”). Below are found the instructions that were given to each participants at the start of the process, which served as the de facto interview guide to help structure each interview.

Please use the provided disposable camera to take pictures based on the guidelines given. Please do not take pictures of anybody’s face or any other identifying features. If possible, take some time to carefully think about what visuals will provide the best information.

Remember that participation is completely voluntary and you are free to stop at any time. Also note that all photographs and information gained from the pictures and interview will remain completely anonymous and confidential. This means researchers will not provide your identity to any agency personnel you may currently be receiving services from. If you have specific questions or concerns you may contact by email Dr. James Brown at [brownj@uwosh.edu](mailto:brownj@uwosh.edu) or Dr. Paul Van Auken at [vanaukep@uwosh.edu](mailto:vanaukep@uwosh.edu). You may also call Dr. Brown at (317) 557-2073 or Dr. Van Auken at (920) 424-2038. If either is not available, please leave a message with the best way to contact you.

In order to *gain more information about gaps and barriers to the Fox Valley housing services*, we are asking that participants take the following pictures:

1. Pictures that represent your day to day experience.
2. Pictures that represent your past.
3. Pictures that represent how you see your future.
4. Pictures that represent how you meet your basic needs, including nutrition, clothing...etc.
5. Pictures that represent what has been helpful in moving you toward secure housing.
6. Pictures of anything that you have experienced as stopping or delaying you in obtaining housing in the Fox Valley.

We would prefer, but it is not mandatory that you take at least one (1) photo from each of the above categories. Once you hand in your camera, the researchers will quickly develop the pictures and meet back with you in a comfortable location. This will allow you the opportunity to share your thoughts about the pictures you have taken.

Thank you for your participation.

### *Data Analysis*

The interviews provided depth and rich, insightful data. Interview transcriptions were read and analyzed using the process of open coding. Open coding is defined as “the part of

analysis that pertains specifically to the naming and categorizing of data by breaking down data into discrete parts, closely examining them, comparing for similarities and differences, and asking questions about the phenomena” (Rubin & Babbie, 2011, p.483). In our study, the goal of open coding was to find common themes within participant responses then subsequently organize, analyze, and illustrate these themes using exemplars from the data. Photos were also used to highlight verbal understanding of participants. Researchers looked for overlapping themes within the participants’ responses.

### *Quantitative Research*

To supplement our findings with the homeless participants, we administered an electronic survey to the Fox Cities Housing Coalition member agencies with the goal of finding areas where the agencies are lacking in providing resources or duplicating services to homeless clients. The data gathered identified service provider perceptions regarding gaps and barriers to servicing the homeless client.

A convenience sample was used containing members of the Fox Cities Housing Coalition. This constituted 26 agencies that provide some level of service for participants in this study who were housing insecure. An electronic survey was developed in collaboration with members of the coalition to make sure content validity was achieved. The President of the coalition emailed a survey link to each member in the coalition.

The research team experienced challenges in producing an adequate number of participants from the service provider side as well. Despite significant encouragement from Coalition leadership to participate, in the end a relatively small number did. This likely stemmed from numerous factors, but it is possible that some employees at Coalition member organizations

did not feel comfortable sharing their perspectives due to the fear of retribution or other concerns.

In total, there were 28 completed surveys, including fifteen Organization Management/Leadership (OML) respondents and thirteen Case Manager (CM) respondents. Several respondents reported that they were halfway through the survey and were ejected. No explanation was given as to why this occurred.

Statistical software was then used to analyze the responses and descriptive statistics (percentages) were produced to quantify responses to questions. Differences in responses from OML and CM were compared.

## **FINDINGS**

### *Qualitative*

Eight homeless participants provided in-depth interviews that yielded insight into how each became homeless, the helpful resources that are available, and the barriers that may be arising to securing housing. Findings are discussed below and organized according to the themes developed in the analysis. Pictures taken by homeless participants are used in several examples. It should be noted that participated are referred to by the original number entered into the project database when contact was made, which is why some participants have numbers higher than the number of participants (eight) the team was actually able to interview.

#### *Internal Circumstances for Homelessness*

Disability can be cause for homelessness. For example, participant 24, a middle age male, stated, “*My disabilities. They are not letting me work until I get a doctor say give me a*

*release to go back to work...I've got a bad shoulder and a bad back. I got a lot of health issues."*

Programs designed to help people who are struggling to find housing may not always represent a workable match with the needs of participants. For Participant 7, a program was not workable in ending homelessness. "*I was in a homeless veteran's program and I got discharged from that.*" Such internal circumstances seem to reflect participants' vulnerable mental/emotional or physical abilities that prevent them from maintaining housing.

#### *External Circumstances for Homelessness*

External circumstances may be part of reciprocating with systems that may not work to participant's advantage. An example by Participant 6 demonstrates this outcome. "*I'm at a homeless shelter; I have to pay child support.*" He later suggested, "*I've filed bankruptcy, I got divorced ...I've got no money.*" Furthermore, part of his reciprocation in finding long term employment can be attributed to remaining homeless: "*two weeks, three weeks into it, then you get canned...temps.*" Participant 6's understanding of working was that he is a short-term fix when it comes to securing long-term employment.

Even if a participant may have internal barriers to homelessness, external barriers can also be attributed to how participants make sense of causing their homelessness. Participant 24, with having major physical disabilities, looks at how that has led to external barriers. "*I haven't worked in a year and a half and that's pretty much what got me homeless.*"

Participant 14 stated between being in jail for months and having to wait for social security with "*no finances coming in, I have to tend for myself.*" Indeed, financial obligations were easy for participants to identify in perpetuating homelessness. According to Participant 13, "*I owe the state apparently 40K in income that someone paid me to do my blogs.*"

## *Services*

Services in the Fox Valley include transportation, housing, and public institutions, such as the library. Agencies also provide services to this population. Agencies that were frequently mentioned as providing helpful services were identified by participants. For example, participant 14, a male, suggested: *"I get bus vouchers at St. Vinnys or F-set or my probation officer or the mental health clinic gives them."* Participants mentioned bus passes to access services repeatedly.

Participant 24 also identified helpful service provisions: *"They [St. Vincent de Paul's] have got me a hotel room for 10 days once which is pretty cool"* and *"I heard that at the warming shelter they let them stay in and didn't kick them out into the winter. So that's a good thing."* Participant 24 also stated, *"Workforce Development because that has been helpful."*

Participant 7, a middle aged white male discussed some of his favorite services in the Fox Valley: *"Salvation Army. Lunches there every day...."* Also, *"Emergency Shelter. Fairly clean and newer and can get you things you need... The staff there is really good to me."* Finally, Participant 6, a middle aged white male stated, *"I go to workforce development which is a great place. You go there and you can email, fax, whatever. They will help you with anything."* He later stated that the Salvation Army is, *"pretty much where I go for lunch and they help out. They're great people."* And lastly, the participant states that regarding being homeless once again, *"they will welcome you back...at least the Warming does."*

Criticism was also given by some participants that clearly had less than positive experiences with providers. Predictably, waiting lists were frequently mentioned as a source of frustration. According to Participant 24, *"finding help for housing is really difficult around here. There are waiting lists, a lot of places you got to have a kid in order to get help, which I mean I*

*do but I don't...The Salvation Army has a housing thing but again it's a waiting list."* Participant 24, who has struggled with disabilities and was waiting for the system to determine his eligibility, went on:

*The Emergency Shelter doesn't seem to be so kind to people that are waiting on disability determination for example they'll tell you that you only have so many days and if you have a job they kick you out. So that's kind of ridiculous, because I'm sitting around waiting on a determination and they want to tell me that I can go and get a job and the lawyer is telling me no don't get a job, who are you going to listen to, the people that are trying to kick you out the door, that's what it seems like to me at the Emergency Shelter, they are just trying to push people out the door. So it doesn't seem like it's as helpful as it should be.*

This participant suggested that some homeless people's situation may be extremely complicated. Being able to attend to the nuances of those complications have complicated situations that may put them at a greater disadvantage than other homeless participants.

Another service that was criticized by participants was police, and particularly policing that occurred while at the public library. Participant 7, a white, middle age male, described his experiences this way: "*They are always being called to haul us homeless people off if we to sleep or something. I try to keep a book in front of me.*" *photo of police car in library parking lot.*"



Figure 3. "They are always being called to haul us homeless people off."

### *Case workers*

Case workers, who are in charge of helping this population secure temporary housing and provide leads to other services, were identified as being spread too thin. As Participant 14 stated, "He is swamped and has limited resources."



Figure 4. "They're swamped"

Being swamped may contribute to limited communication interagency in getting the word out to participants. Participant 14 explained it this way: *"They have Fish n' Chips on Friday. The church in Neenah does free lunch during the week. There's no resource lists for churches, just word of mouth. No clue as to who's doing what."* This participant suggests a gap of the services that may exist outside the 26 service providers that may go unnoticed by participants due to caseworkers being swamped and attending to other concerns.

#### *Service barriers*

Finding and receiving mental health services can be challenging. Here Participant 7 tells of his barrier to mental health services, *"I went back to X county to see a counselor, a psychologist in 2013. Said I wasn't at a sustainable address."* This experience of being denied

mental health service due to lack of a permanent address has created a lasting barrier to psychological service for the participant.

A young male, Participant 7, shared throughout his interview a sense that services as a whole are not equipped to deal with demand: *“I guess there is no good place to go; everyone refers you to someone else. If you find someplace that does help they get bogged down and then not helpful anymore. Everyone is bogged down for people released from jail...too many lists.”*

This suggests that although participants want one stop shopping for services, they must constantly attend to lists and services that may be depleted.

### *Systemic barriers*

Participants who experienced short term success had experiences that put them in a cycle in and out of homelessness: Find a job, build up cash, pressure to leave shelter, finding an apartment, getting fired, let go, or “laid off,” losing the apartment, becoming homeless, and re-entering into the warming shelter. This cycle, when repeated, seemed to decrease hope in the process of securing long-term housing. Here, participant 6, an exemplar in demonstrating descriptive understanding, is a middle-aged person who has owned homes in the past and was at the time of the interview looking for a job while trying to stay motivated, put it this way:

*I get jobs at places. I've had a really good one, but I had a probation problem, so that was my fault. But otherwise, you get temp jobs and they say, yeah temp-to-hire, and you start going and you get enough money and they want you to move out of the shelter. You do, and a week later you get laid off. They say that it's all good to go, and you can't stop people, it's scary right now the way they are. When you're in temp services and the guy doesn't like the way you look. He can say, 'he's got to go.'*

Researcher: “Right and that's what you described as a vicious circle earlier.”

*Right because, you're going to get out, and you're going to feel good, do something and you get laid off and lose your job. And then everything, you're going to have to go back to the shelter. And I've got to admit, they welcome you back. Right now they do. So at least it's a place to go.*

This same participant talks about how the systemic barrier of temp agencies put these participants in a vulnerable position:

*They say... temp-to-hire. You go two weeks, three weeks into it, you get canned, so ok, I'm at the Warming Shelter. I get enough money... As soon as you save a grand, you have to leave. You save a couple bucks, they want you out, and a week later, you get laid off. Temp services, I don't want to smash any one of them, I just kind of did a picture of, but that's what's happening with this industry is everything's going through temps because you can walk in there and the boss can look at you and say I don't like you, and fire you... So you can work a couple weeks. One guy can say, 'I don't like that asshole' or blah blah blah, and you're gone... You get canned and they just say we'll find something else for you. Does the landlord like that? No. That's probably the biggest, biggest problem. I have nothing against them really...they want you to work this, blah blah blah... A lot of times temp services, I've been through it with Labor Ready, I was working with a certain company, me and someone, we busted our butts for two days. Next day they said, no we don't want them back because they were lazy... It's not fair. That's my biggest pet peeve right there is how they treat people. Flex staff, they say you need two years of working experience. I said well I have 20 years at this company. Well that's not recent. I said if it was recent I wouldn't be here talking to you. She goes well you don't have to have that attitude to me. I guess I got an attitude. I told her fine I'll leave... What do you want? It's the idea that temp services are bringing people in saying 'temp-to-hire', and three, four weeks into, "well we got slow so they don't need you now. We'll call you back." Can you say that to a landlord? That's the biggest one that's holding not just myself, but a lot of people in this area, and every area.*

Attitude may be a barrier not explicitly mentioned by participants, but there are several examples, including the one above, in this data set of responses to disappointment or criticism from authority figures that participants responded to defensively and put participants on the losing end of such transactions.

Another systemic barrier is the perception of participants not qualifying for housing programs, perhaps due to a legal issue that occurred over a decade earlier according to one participant. Here is participant 14 explaining it this way:

*As for housing in the future, I'm not optimistic about getting help from the county. Denied each week; too many lists. It's just about hurry up and wait. All the programs usually don't respond or get back to you. Outagamie County just denies you quickly. They said I lied to them about pending charges, but I deny that. I feel like I'm excluded from a lot of things. After a while you just withdraw from things. That's about the best way of putting that.*



Figure 5. Outagamie County Building

### *Transportation*

All participants discussed some limitation to Fox Valley transportation, from mass transit not going to certain places to the untimeliness of the schedule. Participant 6 discussed facing this transportation limitation, noting *“there is no real public transportation...that’s kind of rough...I was in Neenah, I got out at midnight (work shift).”* Although scheduling and coverage was a limitation, participant 24 found assistance in receiving bus passes to and from. He explains, *“I get bus vouchers at St. Vinnys or F-set or my probation officer or the mental health clinic give them.”* The willingness of other agency or service providers to give bus passes seems to contribute to participants’ overall mobility to make appointments.

### *Causes for Homelessness*

Causes for homelessness can vary. Many of the participants in this study suggested an inability to socially get along with employers “*how they treat people*” (participant 6), landlords, “*Charged us \$500 a month but said we owed \$650*” (participant 15) or programs designed to end homelessness, “*...I got discharged from that*” (participant 7). There seems to be difficulty in these participants ability to successfully negotiate conflict.

Also, homeless participants with disabilities report feeling vulnerable in the current system of care. As participant 15, a female, stated, “*I'm on disability. I have emotional issues and cognitive problems, plus stomach problems.*” These physical and/or psycho-social-emotional problems seem to be barriers for the population interviewed (e.g., Participant 24 “*They're not very kind to people with disabilities.*”

Our data suggests a basic model for understanding the cycle of homeless that is presented as Figure 5.



Figure 6. The cycle of homelessness

There is also evidence of needing other caseworkers to help locate and provide homeless services in and around the Fox Cities. Although temp jobs may be helpful short-term for this population, but by definition, temp jobs can also cause hardships, especially when having to transition out of one place while working and accumulating income, then, losing work. The cycle of finding a job, building up some cash, being asked to leave the shelter, finding an apartment, getting fired, let go, or “laid off,” losing the apartment, becoming homeless, and re-entering into the warming shelter. This cycle, as stated by Participant 6, seemed to decrease optimism in the process of securing long-term housing.

Lastly, the participants in this study had to traverse a vast landscape that was at times covered by snow and ice. Although bus passes were reportedly given generously by most service providers, participants often found that the service they were referred to (“Everyone refers you to someone else.”) meant waiting on a lists that often were long. This going to and fro only to be placed on a list seemed to cause a great deal of frustration from participants.

### *Recommendations*

- 1) Motivational interviewing—similar to the interviews conducted for this project—may help this population take small obtainable positive steps to finding success. Having a voice is hugely important to individual well-being, and this process may help to empower participants to take action and enhance their self-esteem.
- 2) If a history of conflict regarding getting along with others is identified, including authority figures, such motivational interviewing could be used to channel this subgroup into being trained to be verbal warriors in maintaining respect for themselves and others. Perhaps group work in assertiveness training or other models of intervention could re-address social emotional deficits.
- 3) Having an additional caseworkers connected to services outside of the 26 Fox Cities service providers (e.g., churches) could help feed and provide temporary services to this population.
- 4) Create a longer time period in maintaining a job before locking down an apartment. “Temp jobs” can be short lived and the devastation of losing housing again is difficult.
- 5) Centralize services and resources that help homeless people receive services without having to traverse over the Fox Valley only to find that they will be “put on a list.”

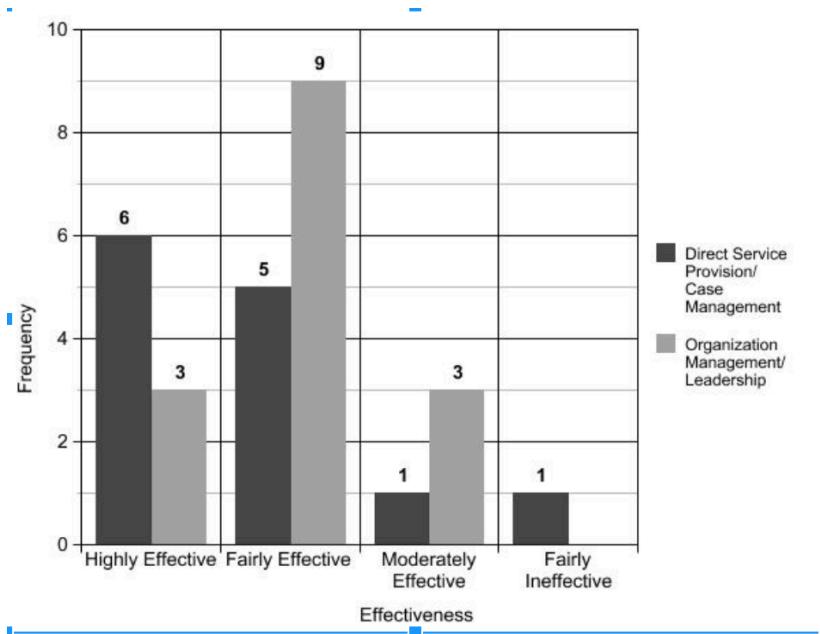
6) Focus upon using the collective resources of Coalition members to increase the supply of affordable housing in the Fox Valley.

- While the national statistics do show a reduction in the number of people considered homeless in the United States, the local research project shows an increase apparently due to the Fox Cities being able to provide available year-round shelter, even if temporary. The long-term success in obtaining permanent stable housing is not very optimistic in the Fox River Valley based upon our interviewees' experiences, however. Our data suggests that more effort is needed to accomplish the stated goal of the federal government to provide stable housing to more citizens, per the Homelessness Prevention and Rapid Re-Housing Program (HPRP) of 2009, which shifts the goal from warehousing the homeless to providing permanent housing or prevention of loss of shelter.

### *Quantitative Analysis*

The findings from the survey of Coalition service providers, based upon responses from fifteen Organization Management/Leadership (OML) respondents and thirteen Case Manager (CM) respondents, are presented below. The actual survey question is presented, followed by results, direct quotes from respondents, and analysis for each question.

*How effective do you believe your agency is at providing affordable housing?*



*Direct Service Provision/Case Management Quotes*

- “For clients that make it through our program successfully, they are expedited to the top of our affordable housing list. This is a huge relief for our clients because of the wait lists that other agencies have. However, we also operate with wait lists, so I can't give us the highest rating”
- “More affordable housing is needed”
- “We try to help place individuals after they have finished our program, but we don't always know what housing options are out there”
- “We work to get clients to where they need to be, but that does not always equal affordable housing. Often times, there is a waitlist and folks are simply unable to access the services that they are qualified for”

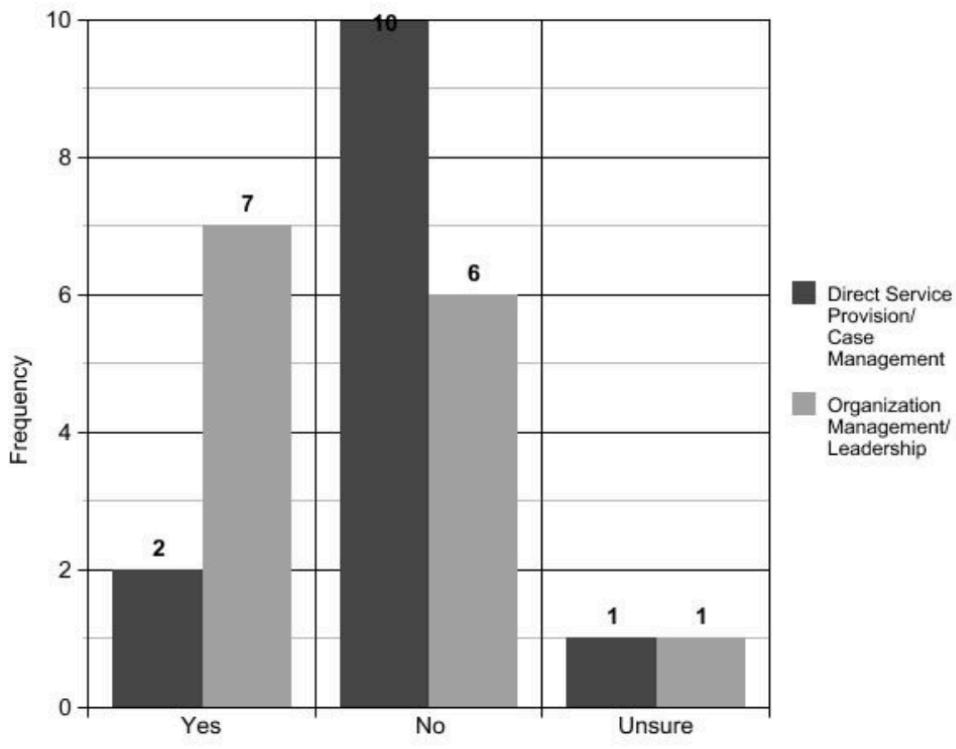
*Organization Management/Leadership Quotes*

- “If we cannot provide a solution for them, we actively work with them to find another solution in our community”
- “We are a volunteer-driven organization. Our staff, and most of our volunteers, do a very effective job of assisting clients”
- “Not enough options”
- “We are the largest provider of affordable housing in our community. We provide people with a comprehensive list of affordable housing options in the community. We counsel people on programming that is available to them including our application for a variety of housing options”
- “for clients who do not follow through we do not have options”

*Summary Statement*

These responses suggest that the waiting list to secure affordable housing was perceived by caseworkers as a barrier. Even those clients that “make it to the top of the list” for successfully completing the program must wait for affordable housing. This was expressed by both administrators and caseworkers. The perceived need for additional access to affordable housing was a suggested focus for the Fox Cities Housing Coalition.

*In regards to language barriers, is your agency limited in any way to providing services to housing clients?*



#### *Organization Management/Leadership Quotes*

- “We use interpreters but that service is very expensive and a drain our limited budget”
- “No one on staff speaks Spanish or Hmong”

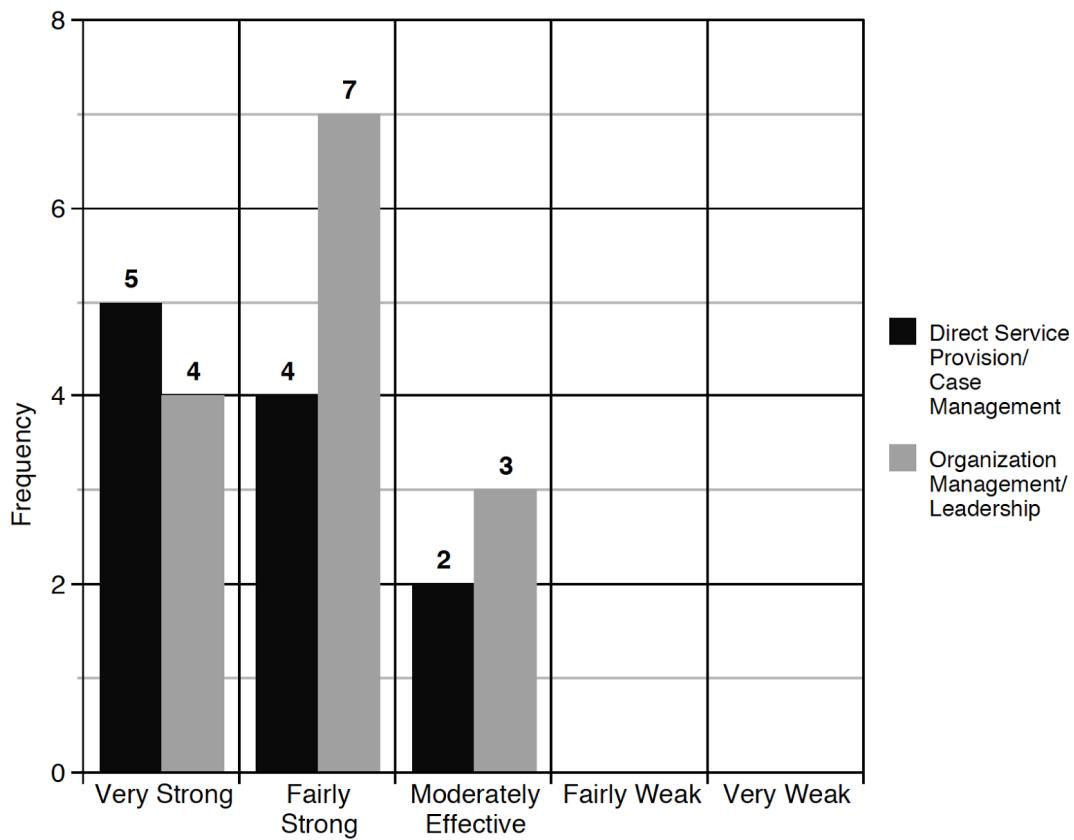
#### *Direct Service Provision/ Case Management Quotes*

- “We do not have bilingual staff, but we do secure interpreters when needed. Language may be an obstacle that we have to get around at times, but we always find a resource and tackle the obstacle”
- “I have been able to work with both Hmong and Hispanic clients”

#### *Summary Statement*

These responses suggested that caseworkers believe although there are language barriers, but they have the resourcefulness to find interpreters. However, administrators saw the barrier as more pervasive with some concern regarding cost for service. The lack of having a permanent, multilingual staff member at a FCHC agency may be a barrier, at least initially.

*I would rate my knowledge of other Fox Cities housing agencies as:*



*Direct Service Provision/Case Management Quotes:*

- “I’ve worked in the Fox Valley for 30 years”
- “I’m well aware of the resources in the community, and have help client navigate those resources that has given me first hand knowledge not all providers have”

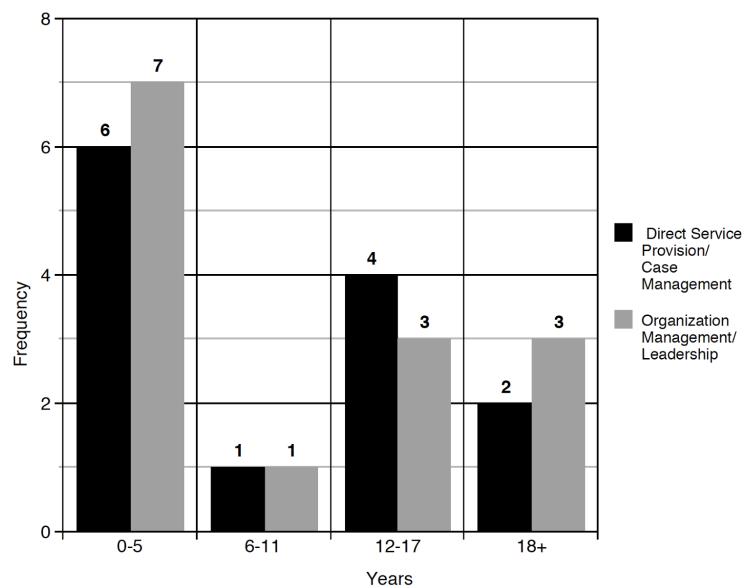
*Organization Management/Leadership Quotes:*

- “We have been working here for over twenty years”
- “I have knowledge but would refer to them”

*Summary Statement*

These responses by coalition members suggested that the majority of both CM and OM believed they have moderate to strong knowledge of Fox Valley Services.

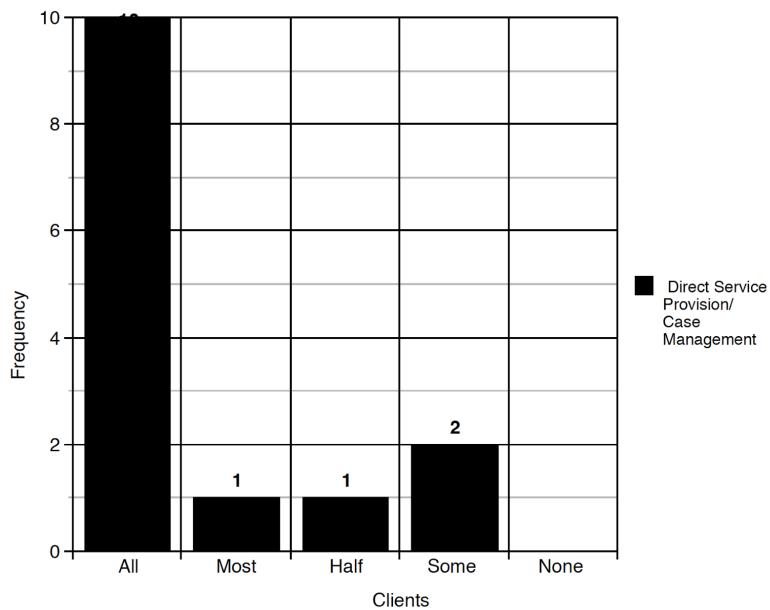
*How many years have you been at your current position at your agency?*



#### *Summary Statement*

These responses suggested a wide variance of years working in a position in a housing agency with the majority of workers having 0-5 years at their current position.

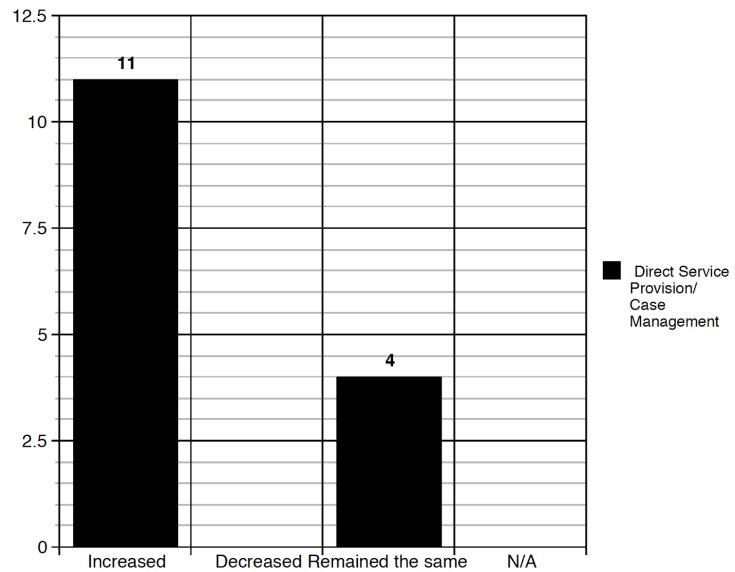
*Approximately how many of your clients are trying to access services related to obtaining affordable housing?*



#### *Summary Statement*

These responses suggested that the majority of case managers in this sample overwhelmingly perceived their clients as trying to access services related to obtaining affordable housing.

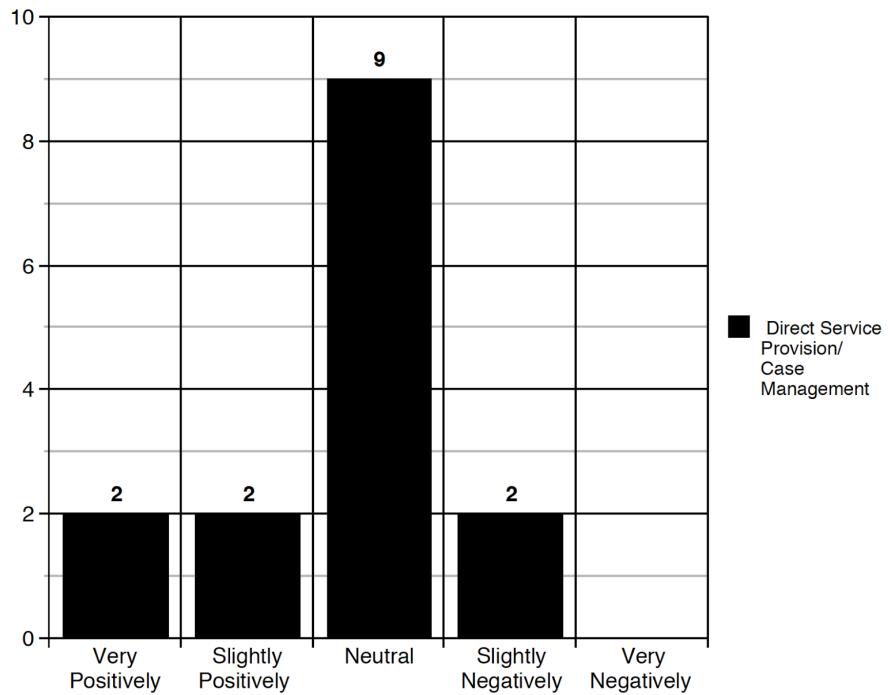
*On average your caseload has (increased, decreased, remained same) over time.*



#### *Summary Statement*

Nearly three times as many CM providers had seen their caseloads of housing clients' increase over time.

*How has your caseload affected your ability to provide services?*



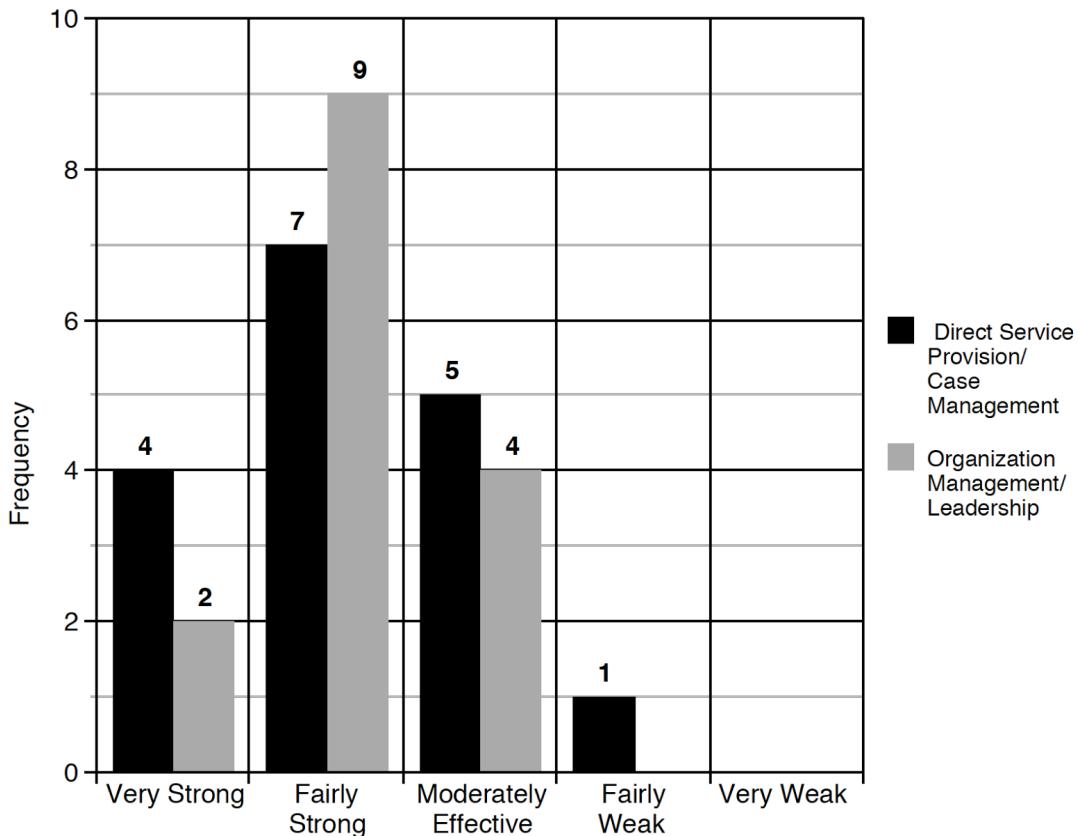
*Direct Service Provision/Case Management Quotes*

- “My caseload does not change as we only have a set number of units that we have available so there is a set number of clients”
- “I would like to increase my caseload to serve more clients but we do not have the funding to do so.”
- “I am able to provide the same services to clients regardless of the caseload”
- “I help my caseload become qualified to become a homeowner, so my caseload makes Habitat better meet it's mission. Some of the people on my caseload are very time consuming due to many barriers so if that is the question, that takes away from the number of people I can serve”
- “I am able to help more people, but sometimes do not have enough time to meet with all of my clients”
- “I will continue to provide the high quality and effective case management services to the clients regardless of the amount of clients I serve. It may mean longer hours as the provider, but the quality and extent of the services will not change”
- “I believe its important to provide clients with a comprehensive service which should not depend on my case load”
- “I provide the same quality of service regardless of volume. It may take more time”
- “Difficult to answer since this questionnaire doesn't seem to fit our agency”

*Summary Statement*

Although case managers suggested that caseloads are very time consuming due to clients having high needs (“many barriers”), overall, service providers reported a commitment to providing services to many clients, even if they had to put in extra time.

*How would you describe your agency’s ability to service the volume of housing clients?*



#### *Direct Service Provision/Case Management Quotes*

- “Many of the clients we serve are low income and housing is just not affordable and waitlists are years long at times”
- “There are more clients needing housing than we can serve”
- “There is a high need for family housing in the valley that is not being served by the whole coalition”
- “More and more people are coming to us with lots of debt and credit issues, so working on that with them takes more time for each person we are working with. Ok now, but at some point soon it will limit how many people with financial issues that we can serve at one given time since we only have so many appointment slots in a day. No wait list yet.”
- “We have a significant number of affordable units available to the community, but there is still a need for more.”

- “We have 75 bed capacity and currently have waiting list. We serve anywhere from 700-800 people a year. We work hard to get people in and then to help leave here successfully into their own housing rather its transitional and permanent”
- “Even with a small staff, we are able to serve all families on the program adequately”
- “It would be helpful if there were more transitional housing programs available.”
- “This agency serves approximately 7500 households per year”

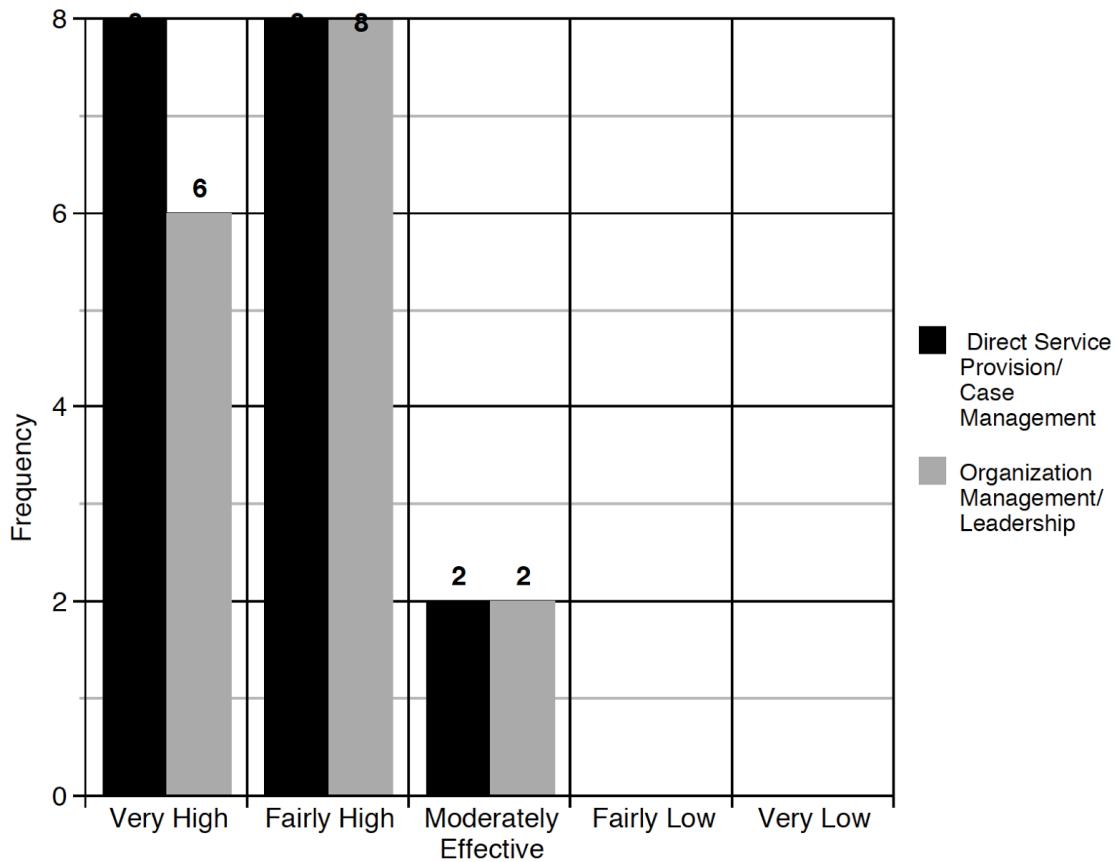
#### *Organization Management/Leadership Quotes*

- “We could use another case manager to more effectively handle the volume”
- “Housing availability is limited to the housing stock we own. if there isn't a unit vacant, we can't serve clients”
- “We have 100 units in our low income, permanent supportive, transitional and market rate programs”
- “We have been able to house and case manage all who have been appropriate and sustain them as well.”
- “We served over 7100 households last year and are on target to meet or exceed that number in 2013. Not all of the requests are for housing. In addition to rent, security deposit and mortgage assistance, we provide financial assistance for utilities, car repairs and other basic needs. We also provide diapers, bus and gas cards, clothing and furniture vouchers”
- “The demand for service is difficult to keep up with”
- “There are limited staff and financial resources to assist the potential volume”
- “We have an intake process that connects individuals who want out program”
- “We anticipate reaching capacity early this year (we are open mid-Oct - mid April. Then people are turned away”
- “Additional staffing would be beneficial”
- “We have 84 units available for a variety of affordable housing options. Our occupancy rate is consistently near full and we still manage a waiting list of up to 100”
- “We have been at capacity several times over the summer of 2013. This is the first time that has happened since we opened in 2009”

#### *Summary Statement*

All but one case manager believed that their agency has the ability to service the current volume of housing clients with moderate to very strong effectiveness. Management reported increased client “capacity”. Direct service workers reported that clients with complex needs (e.g debt, credit card issues) take more time to serve.

*At what level would you suggest your agency is providing services to its housing clients?*



#### *Direct Service Provision/Case Management Quotes*

- “We do not provide housing services”
- “Our agency has a criteria for applicants, so the individuals we are not serving are those who do not fit our criteria of having an income or wanting programming”
- “We have a significant number of affordable units available to the community, but there is still a need for more”
- “We make sure to educate ourselves in knowing what resources are out there for our clients and making the proper referrals”
- “Our staff is well trained, experienced and specialized in their areas of expertise. Our ED has over 35 years of housing and leadership”
- “Provides emergency financial assist to clients for rent, utilities, water some auto repair and mortgages.”

#### *Organization Management/Leadership Quotes*

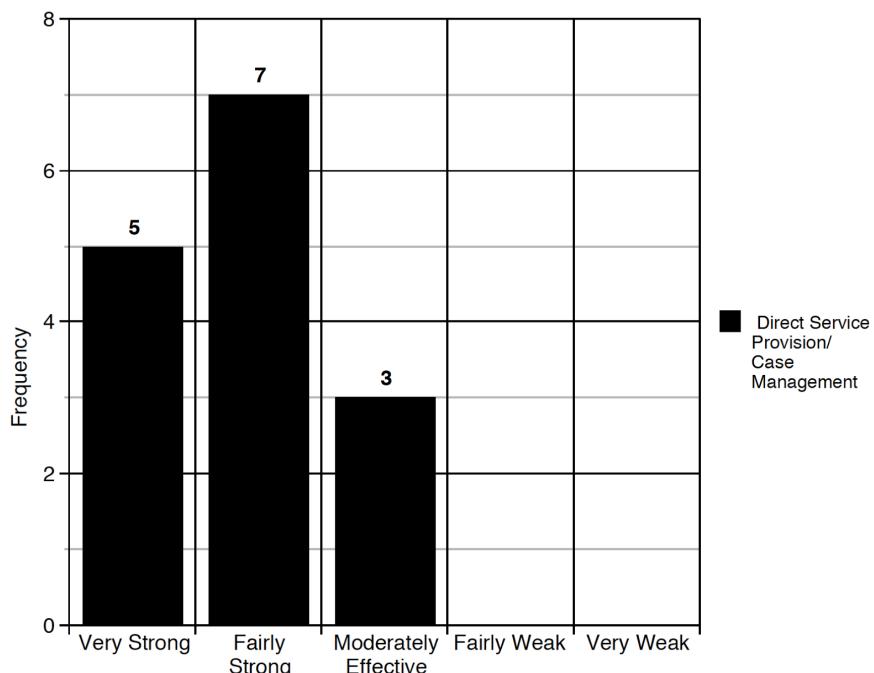
- “We provide an affordable housing solution that is very high quality. Our educational services are very good too”

- “Case managers have weekly face to face contact as well as the on call phone and they are well aware of the other resources our clients may need.”
- “We help when someone is in a crisis. Our help is intended to cancel eviction, prevent foreclosure, prevent utility disconnect, secure affordable housing or”
- “Could use more staff”
- “We can always do more”
- “Our role is in providing funding with required outcomes which supports organizations strength in measuring and demonstrating impact of services.”
- “Supportive services for transitional, permanent supportive, and special needs is high. We do not provide supportive services to other types of affordable housing. Perhaps there is a need here, but we have not explored that”
- “We provide emergency shelter but no case management. I think the clients need case management”

*Summary Statement*

Both CM and OML believed their particular agency is providing moderate or better housing services to their clients.

*The interconnectedness between your agency and other agencies in the Housing Coalition is best described as:*



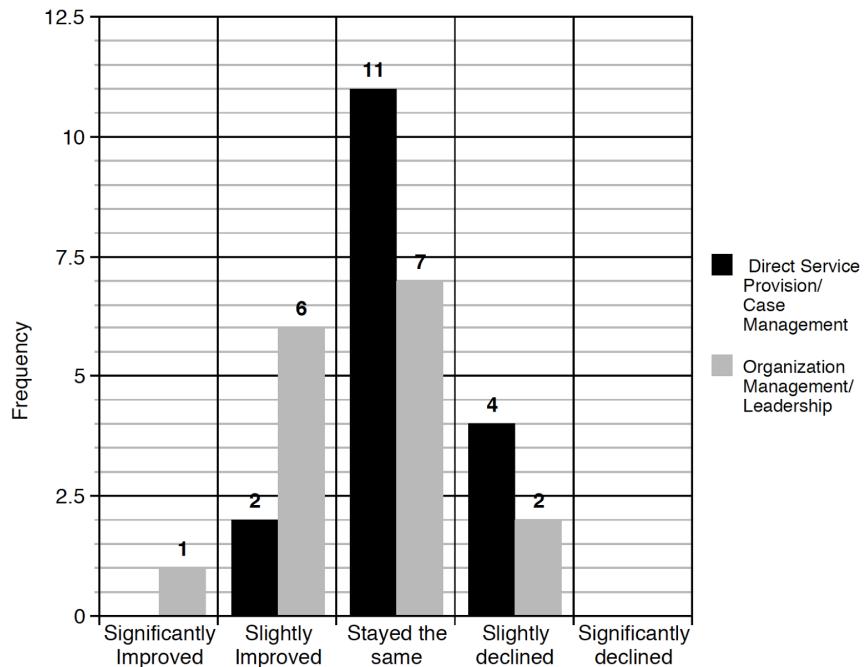
*Direct Service Provision/Case Management Quotes*

- “We can always improve on this, but we are getting better each month at really working together”
- “I feel like I can contact other case managers and communicate well with them”
- “Without this I would not be able to serve my participants”
- “We communicate when we need to about clients.”
- “We have collaborations in place with other agencies in the Housing Coalition, and resource out to others we aren't directly connected with”
- “we work with many of the agencies that are part of the Housing Coalition by referrals, same clients, case management”
- “This community provides many nonprofits and faith based organizations and we all work together”

#### *Summary Statement*

Case managers reported interconnectedness of agencies in the housing coalition as moderate to strong. Respondents reported that the environment in which agencies function promotes cooperation.

*Over the last year, the quality of services provided to clients receiving temporary housing in the Fox Cities has:*



#### *Direct Service Provision/Case Management Quotes*

- “Changes with the rules at the Warming Shelter have made it more difficult to serve the population they should be serving”

- “Emergency Shelter of the Fox Valley, Street Out Reach Program and Warming Shelter”
- “I do not have enough information on this, i work in permanent housing programs”
- “Due to funding cuts growth for capacity has remained stagnant”
- “The clients that I have spoken with haven't said anything was worse or better”

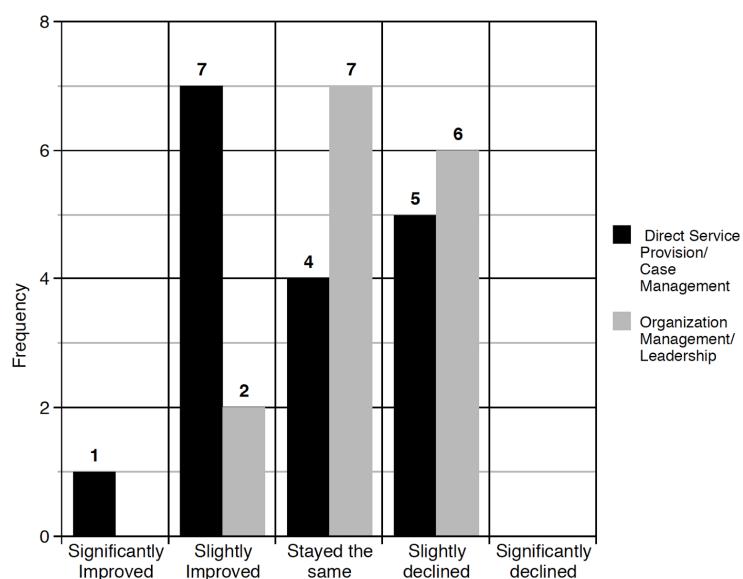
#### *Organization Management/Leadership Quotes*

- “We don't effectively change our models to become more efficient”
- “We continue to improve our services as they are needed”
- ‘We have improved our trust with local landlords thus improving and getting improvements on rentals’
- ‘There are still many times when the emergency shelters are full. However, I believe it has improved because of changes to the FVWS's requirements’
- ‘Demand for service, and staffing changes, both with the leadership of organizations and direct CM staff’
- ‘I think the quality has remained high’
- “The services of the warming shelter are excellent but there is not enough temporary housing”

#### *Summary Statement*

In general direct service providers believed the quality of services provided to clients has largely stayed the same with some reporting a slight decline. Organizational management saw a slightly wider variance with the majority reporting temporary housing for clients saying the same or improving. However, one respondent believed there is not enough temporary housing in the system.

*Over the last year, clients seeking permanent housing services in the Fox Cities have:*



### *Direct Service Provision/Case Management Quotes*

- “Sect. 8 housing, understanding landlords, habitat for humanity, Housing partnership”
- “The Appleton Housing Authority had to close the waiting list due to the volume of clients on the list and was not able to pull families from the waiting list for the first 10 months of the year. However, larger families were able to move through the Appleton Housing Authority Public Housing Waiting List fairly quickly if they met all eligibility qualifications”
- “HUD has been looking toward Rapid Re-Housing versus Transitional Housing. Rapid Re-Housing is considered permanent and therefore, has grown in the recent year”
- “A few more people seem to be willing to work toward the permanent housing goals, lots more are seeking permanent housing but are not willing to take the steps to get there for various reasons including mental health, deferred gratification difficult, etc.”

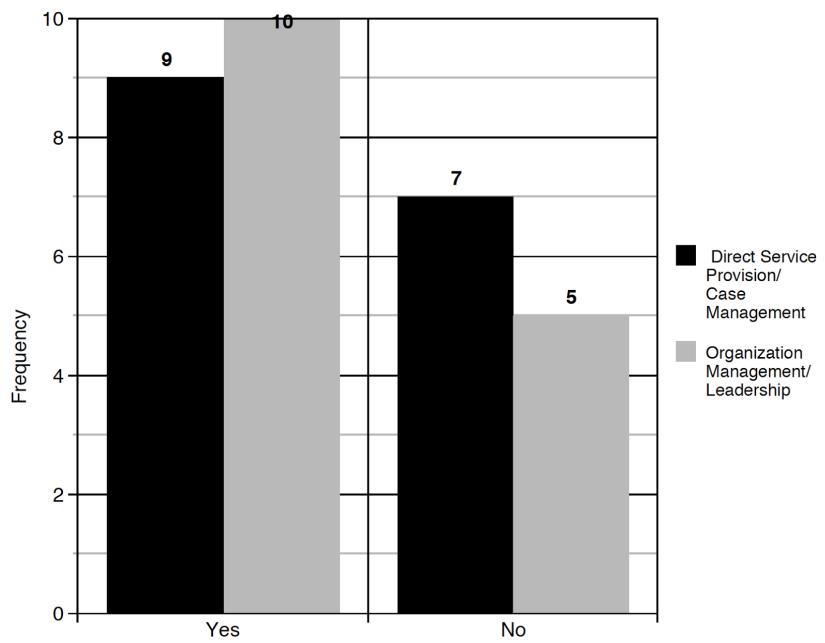
### *Organization Management/Leadership Quotes*

- “Lack of funding for permanent housing. Many grant programs focus on the other end of the housing spectrum”
- “There has been an increase in higher utility debt with the clients seeking permanent housing. The utility debt is much higher than it used to be.”
- “Not really sure but have the idea that people become aware the the fox valley has very good resources”  
“Affordable housing continues to be a problem as wait lists are long (or closed)”
- “Difficult clients to serve who typically need the most in regards to supportive services are not able to access permanent housing services due to arbitrary restrictions”
- “Lack of available affordable housing”  
“I am speaking of Oshkosh where affordable housing is difficult to find”

### *Summary Statement*

DSP and CMs overall tended to report clients seeking permanent housing services as staying the same to improving. However, as one caseworker stated, families may be on a waiting list for nearly a year without being placed due to “high volume.” OML reported concern regarding a decline in available permanent housing over the last year. This suggests greater needs for housing due to high demand.

*Is there anything you would like to see changed to make delivery of services more efficient at your agency?*



### *Direct Service Provision/Case Management Quotes*

- “More donations”
- “A centralized program application for transitional housing programs”
- “The delivery of service is efficient and staff is knowledgeable. Referrals are always made to other agencies for services that we cannot provide”
- “More funding for housing programs”
- “Larger staff, more freedom to serve all homeless clients without being restricted by the state definition, and additional funding to be able to aid with needs we currently can't help with due to limited resources (e.g. transportation and affordable child care)”
- “More clear and concise management letting the case managers have more of a voice”
- “More efficient referral process from outside agencies”

“There is always room for improvement. While I think we do a nice job of exchanging information, I believe that we need to improve on working together to be more efficient and truly help our clients in the way they need us to”

### *Organization Management/Leadership Quotes*

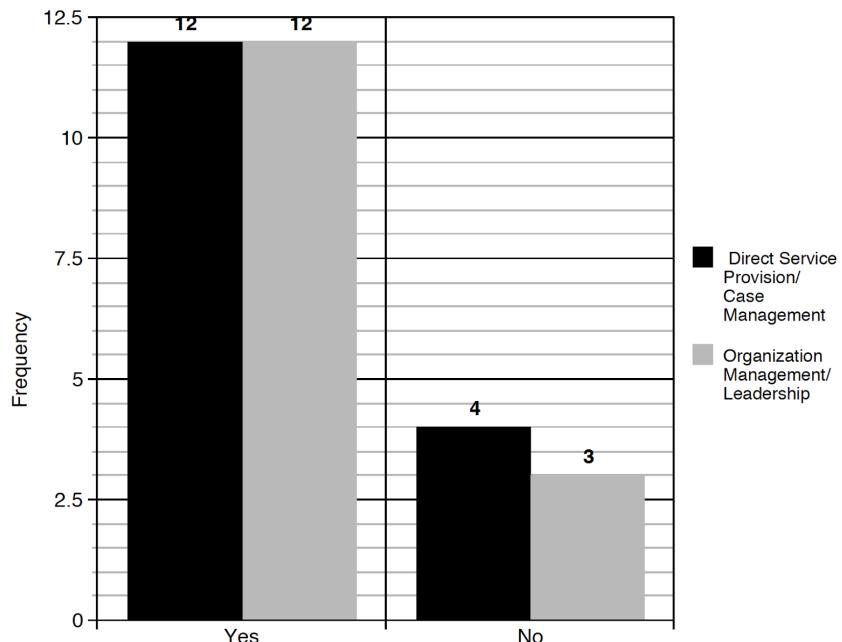
- “Streamline application process”
- “Centralized intake”
- “There are always challenges and barriers in servicing clients. Government requirements and restrictions make this more difficult”
- “Not at this time, However we will adjust to any and all productive changes as needed or required”
- “Our community needs to move toward a central intake system, preferably a single point of entry”

- “More outreach to difficult clients. Preference given to those clients with the greatest need and greatest barriers”
- “Program regulations that are implemented from the state and federal levels would have to be streamlined/reduced”
- “We need a community wide collaboration of service entities so people in need are not sent on wild goose chases and have to retell their story. Many agencies do not know what the others do”
- “Balanced funding from HUD/Congress so we can maintain baseline of the level of families we provide rental assistance to  
“Better understanding of capacity and bottlenecks throughout Housing Continuum. Centralized intake”
- “I would like us to have a case manager, but that is not our mission and would increase our costs”

*Summary Statement*

Service providers, both CM and OML, repeatedly stated they would like to see changes to make services “more centralized.” Also, ideas of making services more efficient were expressed, e.g., referral process, so described by one OML provider stated, that people in need are not sent on wild goose chases (regarding lack of a coherent community wide collaboration of services).

*Is there anything you would like to see change system wide regarding the assistance given to clients seeking to secure housing in the Fox Cities?*



*Direct Service Provision/Case Management Quotes*

- “More inter-agency collaboration with certain hard-to-serve clients”
- “Expansion of transitional housing opportunities”
- “There maybe should be a different rent calculation formula instead of 30% of income. or possibly a slightly higher minimum rent criteria. maybe a timeframe for those not on a fixed income to be on the program”
- “More open communication about openings and availability in transitional and permanent housing”
- “Increased number of resources for youth aging out of the foster care system, increased access to affordable housing, higher minimum wage so individuals/families can afford housing without needing a subsidy”
- “Smoothener processes and understandings of programs”
- “Would like to see centralized intake/referrals since often someone is referred to me on the opposite end of the continuum of care that I serve”
- “More available affordable permanent housing.”
- “Many providers outside the Housing Coalition do not understand what the housing agencies provide.....i.e. the difference between Appleton Housing Authority and Housing Partnership so hard to inform clients of what is available”
- “We need some new ideas to create housing that is affordable for low to moderate income folks. Whether that is co-op housing or building more apartments or renovating older, run down housing in our area; we really need some innovation in order to do more with less”

#### *Organization Management/Leadership Quotes*

- “Centralized intake. More collaboration. Incentives for individuals/families to "move up" the housing continuum (people tend to stay in subsidized housing since there is no incentive for them to move on, this causes huge waiting lists and an inefficient program)”
- “Centralized intake”
- “We have implemented a bi-weekly case management meeting to assist in collaboration between agencies and this should help system wide.”
- “More collaboration”
- “Most likely it would need to be faster turn around time for disbursement of allotted dollars”
- “There needs to be more accountability or greater incentive for people in subsidized housing to become more self-sufficient. When their rent is tied to their income, some don't do enough to increase their income”
- “After care programs that routinely meet with the clients”
- “Single point entry”
- “Further resources available for low income housing”
- “Centralized referral. I would also like to see victims of domestic abuse to back to being prioritized for vouchers”

- “Clients need more follow up case management to maintain their housing once it is secured. Case managers need to communicate closely with housing providers regarding any concerns.”
- “Much more affordable and transitional housing is needed”

*Qualitative Summary Statement*

From this sample of Housing Coalitions partners, case managers suggested that the services provided by each agency of the House Coalition may not be known to the majority of the public, especially if similar services are being provided by different agencies (i.e., Appleton Housing Authority and Housing Partnership). It may be to the Coalition’s advantage to have informational brochures that outline key services of each agency to be available in public entities as well as in each Housing Coalition agency. Organizational management suggested that routine aftercare of clients that have secured housing is crucial for a client to be successful. It was also suggested there needs to be single point entry through a central referral process.

*Conclusions*

This data provided by CM and OML provides some descriptive data regarding the Fox Cities Housing Coalition’s views about service provision for unhoused individuals. There are two primary findings that emerged from this survey of service providers. First, the CM and OML suggestions to centralize and streamline the intake and initial services for housing insecure clients were underscored by survey respondents. Second, the availability of affordable, temporary, and permanent housing in the Fox Cities was seen as a key barrier to addressing housing needs of families and individuals.

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