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OF WOOD BUFFALO



"Homelessness  
Initiatives Steering  
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Alberta seniors

Athabasca Tribal  
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Centre of Hope

CMHA

Family Crisis Society  
"Unity House"

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Fort McMurray Food  
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Fort McMurray  
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Human Resources  
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Northern Lights  
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Regional Municipality  
of Wood Buffalo

Regional Issues  
Working Group  
"Housing Committee"

Salvation Army

United Way of Fort  
McMurray

Wood Buffalo Housing  
& Development  
Corporation

# REPORT ON HOUSING NEEDS IN FORT MCMURRAY



**November  
2006**

**Prepared by:  
Fort McMurray Housing  
Needs Count Committee**

**Prepared for:  
Homelessness Initiatives  
Steering Committee**

# FORT McMURRAY HOUSING NEEDS COUNT 2006

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# FORT McMURRAY HOUSING NEEDS COUNT 2006

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## CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND

### Community Plan on Homelessness & Affordable Housing

The count was organized and implemented by the Housing Needs Count Committee, an ad hoc committee under the direction of the Homelessness Initiatives Steering Committee, as part of ongoing efforts to understand the scope and nature of housing needs in Fort McMurray.

The housing needs data was generated to assist in understanding the particular demographics of the Fort McMurray population experiencing homelessness. The research will be used to update priorities in the Community Plan on Homelessness and Affordable Housing and will assist with future planning and development efforts concerned with housing needs within the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo.

## PROJECT APPROACH

A point-in-time agency and location street count survey was utilized to count the homeless population of Fort McMurray providing a “snapshot” of the homeless population on a given day. The Count was conducted from 8:00 am – 6:00 pm on Tuesday, October 24, 2006. Environment Canada recorded temperatures on Count Day at a high of 12.4 and a low of -2.1. The count enumerated all those who could be characterized as homeless in one day, providing a view into the size and composition of the population currently experiencing homelessness.

### Location & Agency Count

The survey was administered at 12 street locations and at 8 agencies; in emergency shelters, at the hospital, jail cells, the soup kitchen and other locations frequented by homeless persons. Volunteers were enlisted as surveyors at street locations and agency staff supervised enumeration activities on site. Two street locations (Peter Pond Mall and River City Center Mall) were eliminated due to a lack of participation at the site. Since the last count in 2004, two new service agencies are in operation in the community and therefore data was collected at these sites as well. In addition Superstore was added to the list of street locations to be surveyed.

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## **Methodology**

The 2006 Housing Needs Count was conducted using the same two survey questionnaires developed in 2003. The question regarding the number of dependents was clarified on the street survey and the agency survey question related to numbers of individuals turned away from shelters was not completed on any surveys and was eliminated.

The survey opened with a question that was designed to reduce duplication in the count by inquiring if the person had been surveyed yet today. The second survey question asked if the individual had a permanent residence to return to that night. A permanent residence was understood to be one where you can stay long term and in a place meant for human habitation. If an individual responded yes to this question, the survey was terminated. Four questions were asked to gather demographic information on those surveyed. The location surveys also asked participants if they planned to stay in the Municipality for six months as well as a question related to income that was not asked at agency counts.

No media were contacted prior to the count to avoid attracting unnecessary attention to count activities that could potentially impact responses or response rates. However, a media release was issued in the weeks prior to the count requesting volunteer support and an interview with the media was given the day of the count by a street location volunteer and the Count Coordinator.

## **Count Volunteers**

Volunteers were pooled from among a number of local agencies and businesses. A volunteer orientation was offered to volunteers and conducted in small group sessions or on an individual basis. This gave individuals an opportunity to review the survey questionnaire and to provide surveyors with a set of instructions for conducting the count. Volunteers were given emergency services contact information to distribute to individuals identifying themselves as homeless.

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## **Fort McMurray's Housing Needs Report: Key Findings**

- Four hundred and forty one (441) people were counted in the total homeless population (includes respondents & their dependents) \*
  - This is a 24% increase from three hundred fifty five (355) people reported as homeless two years ago in 2004.
  
- A majority of homeless individuals (90%) were single.
  
- Males accounted for 72% of the total homeless population
  - This is increased slightly from the 63% reported in the last count
  
- Volunteers observed the homeless population to be 54% Caucasian, 35% Aboriginal and 11% other.
  
- Two hundred and fifty three (253) people (about 64%) of homeless status fell within the age category of 31-54
  - This figure represents a decrease from the 71% reported in the last count.
  - There was a corresponding increase of 5% in the 18-30 age range.
  
- One hundred and seventy six (176) respondents or 70% of people counted at the street locations indicated they are residents of the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo. Seventy six (76) people or 30% said they were not residents. Agency surveys did not ask this question of the 138 people they surveyed.
  
- Seventy eight percent (78%) of homeless individuals who answered the survey responded yes to the question on whether or not they see themselves living here in six months. This is approximately the same percentage reported in the last count.
  
- One hundred and seven individuals (44%) indicated they had a source of income. This is down from the 61% reported in the last count.
  
- Majority of individuals who were questioned reported they live in the urban area of the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo.

\*Unless stated otherwise figures do not include dependents. All data analysis is based on completed responses & non - responses have been omitted from percentage totals.

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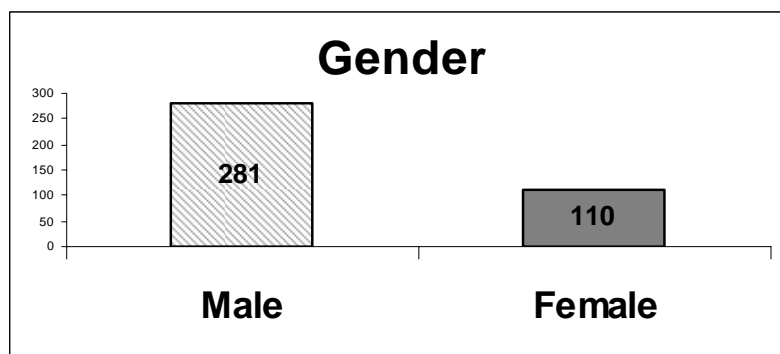
## SUMMARY & COUNT RESULTS

The 2006 Housing Needs Count was conducted on October 24, 2006. The count found 441 people without a permanent residence. The one-day survey captured the responses of individuals who were unable to obtain safe, adequate and affordable housing at the time of the count. This report describes both the absolute homeless and the sheltered homeless, those individuals who found shelter in one of the community's emergency shelters, group or transitional homes.

This "snapshot" of the homeless population was undertaken by the Fort McMurray Housing Needs Count Committee, an ad hoc committee under the guidance of the Wood Buffalo Homelessness Initiatives Steering Committee, to provide insight into the size and scope of the homeless population in Fort McMurray, Alberta. The count was conducted at various outdoor locations throughout the downtown core where people who are experiencing homelessness are known to congregate, as well as at service sites where agencies have direct contact with homeless individuals. The committee recognizes that as this is a one day survey, only those people who participated in the survey have been counted. There will be some people who were missed, due to such difficulties as the limited time of the surveys and people choosing not to participate. A spring count will be organized with longer survey times and there will be an increase in the number of locations where the surveys are being completed.

The Count Committee applied the methodology used in the 2004 Housing Needs Count to conduct this years' count. This allows for comparison of the numbers gathered in this count with previous counts completed in Fort McMurray.

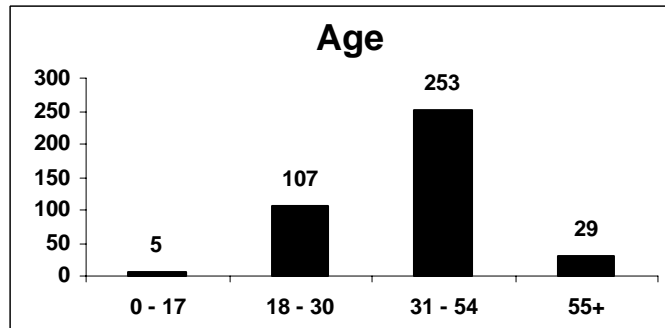
The count identified 441 individuals:



- The table above illustrates numbers of males and females. Of those whose gender was recorded, males accounted for 72% of the total homeless population and females accounted for 28%. Totals do not include dependents (43) or item non-responses (7).

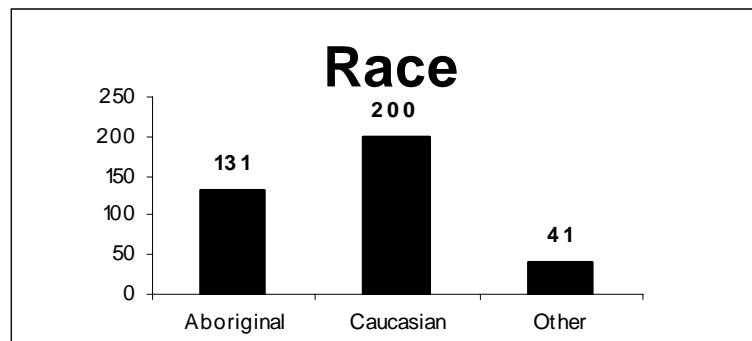
# FORT McMURRAY HOUSING NEEDS COUNT 2006

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\*Totals do not include dependents (43) or item non-responses (4).

- The table above illustrates the numbers of people surveyed in each age group. Completed responses indicate that the 0-17 group accounted for 1% of the homeless population, the 18-30 group accounted for 27%, the 31-54 group accounted for 64% and the 55+ group accounted for 8%.
- No inquiries were made into the gender or age of dependents.



\*Totals do not include dependents (43) or item non-responses (4).

\*Race was observed by the surveyor and not asked of the respondents.

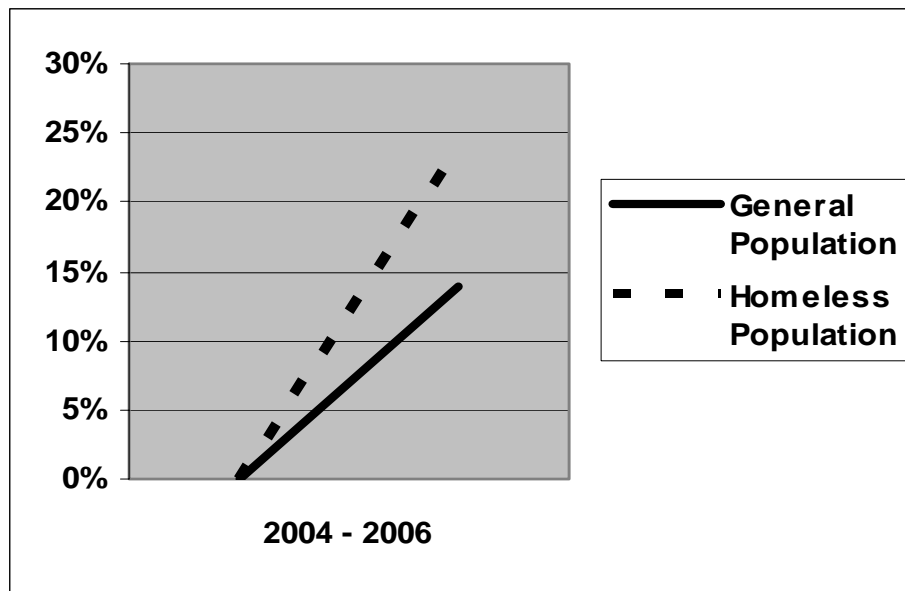
- The percentage of individuals observed to be of Aboriginal heritage comprised 35% of the total homeless respondents.
- The percentage of individuals observed to be of Caucasian heritage comprised 54% of the total homeless respondents.

On the day of the housing needs count Fort McMurray's shelter capacity was approximately 188 beds. Over the 2005 – 2006 year, shelter's operated at between 73% and 100% capacity.

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The homeless population in Fort McMurray increased approximately 24% between 2004 and 2006 with 86 more individuals counted as homeless than the previous year. This growth is much higher than that of the general population which grew by approximately 14% in the same time period according to Municipal Census 2004/2006 of population for Fort McMurray.



We have included the following charts to provide a comparison of the homeless population of Fort McMurray with the cities of Edmonton, Calgary, Grand Prairie, and Red Deer.

City	Population	# homeless	# of homeless per 65000 pop.
Calgary	1,000,000 (2006)	3436 (2006)	223
Edmonton	712,391 (2005)	2618 (2006)	239
Red Deer	82,971 (2006)	128 (2006)	100
Fort McMurray	64,441 (2006)	441 (2006)	441
Grande Prairie	44,631 (2005)	179 (2006)	259

Data analysis for homeless characteristics, demographics and other statistics in this report are based solely upon completed responses.

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## COMMENTS

### Counting Homeless

Many people are not permanently homeless but move in and out of a homeless state making it difficult to enumerate the number of individuals that are at any time experiencing homelessness. Due to constant changes in the number of homeless individuals and families that may move in and out of homelessness and due to the "hidden" and transient nature of the homeless population, a census of persons homeless on a given day will not necessarily translate into an accurate reflection of the homeless population of a given month or year. One street location has indicated they spoke with approximately ten people the day following the count that had not been enumerated so the actual number of absolute homeless could be higher than reported at this location.

Since the 2004 Housing Needs Count was conducted, we have two additional facilities to shelter homeless individuals; Marshall House with 82 beds and Centennial House with 12 beds.

Comment forms were given to volunteers to solicit their feedback on the count project in terms of what went well or what factors need to be for consideration when undertaking the count in the future. This information will be incorporated into continuous improvement planning for the next count.

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Wood Buffalo Homelessness Initiatives Steering Committee would like to thank the many individuals and organizations that generously contributed time, information and resources to making Fort McMurray's third Housing Needs Count a tremendous success.

The Committee would like to specially recognize the essential and significant contributions of the respondents themselves, whose willingness to disclose sensitive information made this project possible.

Thanks and appreciation is extended to the Homelessness Initiatives Count Committee, Count Volunteers and participating organizations whose concern for the needs of the community motivated and sustained the project. Below is a listing of agencies and businesses that contributed to the count project's success.

Advanced Bottle Depot	Nistawoyou Friendship Centre
Alberta Brain Injury	Pastew Place Detox Centre
Alberta Human Resources & Employment	Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo
Canadian National Resources Limited	Royal Canadian Mounted Police
Centre of Hope	Saint Aidan's Foster Care Program
Fellowship Baptist Church	Salvation Army
Fort McMurray Association for Community Living	Save On Foods
Fort McMurray Family Crisis Society	7-Eleven Convenience Store
Fort McMurray Food Bank	Signs R Us
Great Canadian Superstore	Suncor Energy
Human Resources Development Canada	The Dugout
Keyano College	Wilma Hunt
Northern Lights Health Centre	Wood Buffalo HIV/AIDS Society
McMan Youth Family	Wood Buffalo Housing & Development

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