



STREET SERVICE

*Serving people who are unsheltered through street outreach
in Racine, Wisconsin.*

*Scott Metzel, HOPES Center of Racine
Presented to Department of Health Services
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Disclaimer

- ❑ Unsheltered Homelessness is contextual and looks different in different communities and at different times.
- ❑ There are different ways to approach street outreach.
- ❑ This presentation only gives a brief overview of street outreach in the context of Racine, Wisconsin in 2023.



A photograph of three construction workers walking away from the camera on a paved bridge or walkway at night. They are wearing high-visibility yellow safety vests. The worker on the left is carrying a black bag, the middle worker is carrying a blue bag, and the worker on the right is carrying a backpack. To their left is a large, weathered concrete wall. To their right is a green metal railing. In the background, there are trees and a yellow and black striped warning sign on a pole. The scene is illuminated by a bright light source, possibly a street lamp, creating a strong shadow on the ground.

Street Outreach In Context

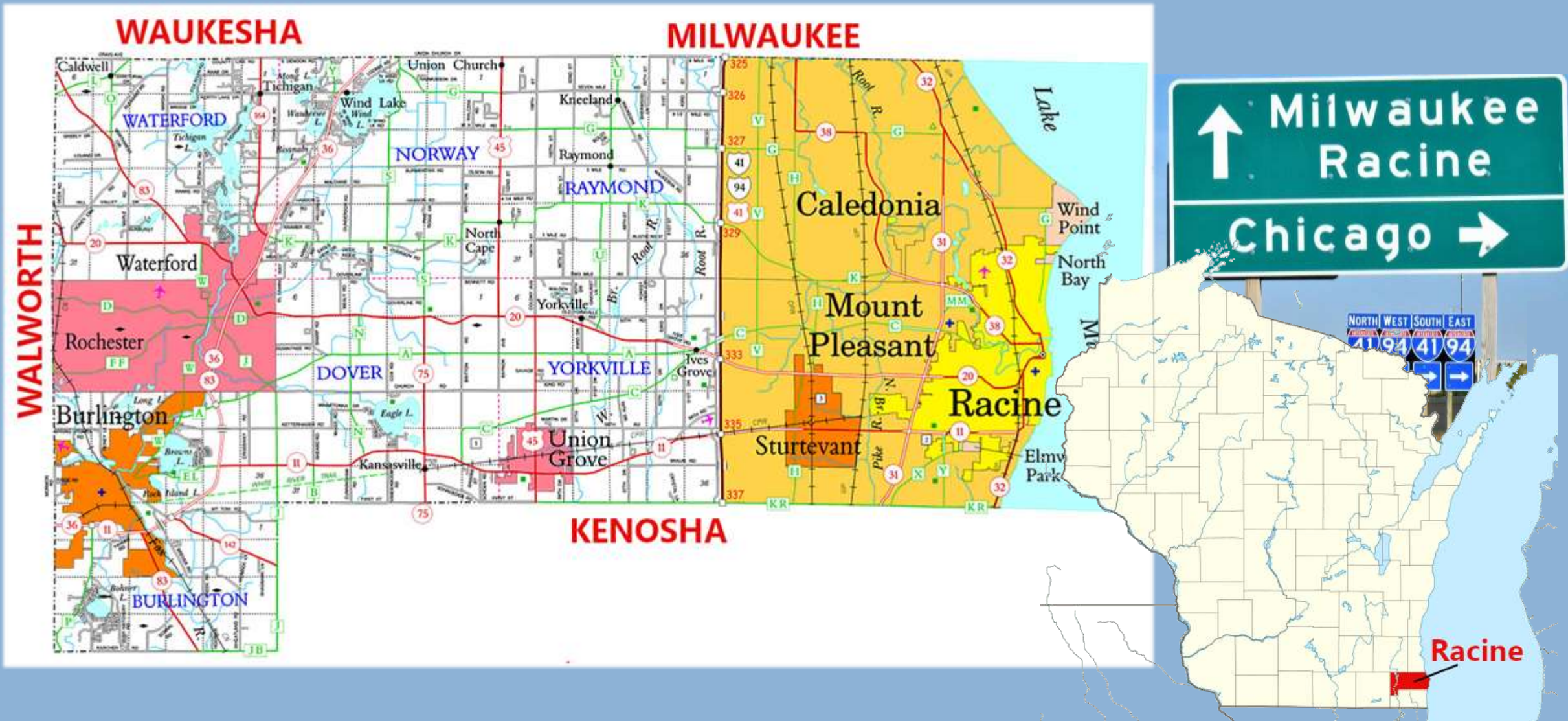
Factors Affecting Street Outreach in Racine



Racine, Wisconsin

The Belle City and greater Racine County

Racine County Geography



Racine County People*



POPULATION		Racine County	City of Racine
Total Population		196,896	77,127
Population in Poverty		12.4%	19.8%
Race and Ethnicity	White	82.7%	61.1%
	Black / African American	12.2%	22.7%
	American Indian / Alaskan Native	0.7%	0.5%
	Asian	1.4%	0.8%
	Native Hawaiian / Pacific Islander	0.1	0%
	Two or More Races	3.0%	10.6%
	Hispanic	14.8%	23.3%

Racine's Continuum of Care (WI-502)

- ☐ Street Outreach Services
- ☐ Shelters
- ☐ Veterans Services
- ☐ Day Services
- ☐ Employment Services
- ☐ Children and Youth Services
- ☐ Rapid Rehousing
- ☐ Transitional Housing
- ☐ Permanent Supportive Housing
- ☐ City and County of Racine
- ☐ Funding Agencies
- ☐ Others





Homelessness

Defining and counting who is homeless in Racine

Definitions in Conflict

McKinney / Vento

HEARTH Act*

**DOUBLED UP
IS
HOMELESS**

**DOUBLED UP
IS NOT
HOMELESS**

(Definition used in this presentation.)

**Homeless Emergency Assistance for Rapid Transition to Housing Act - 2009*

HEARTH DEFINITION (Summarized)

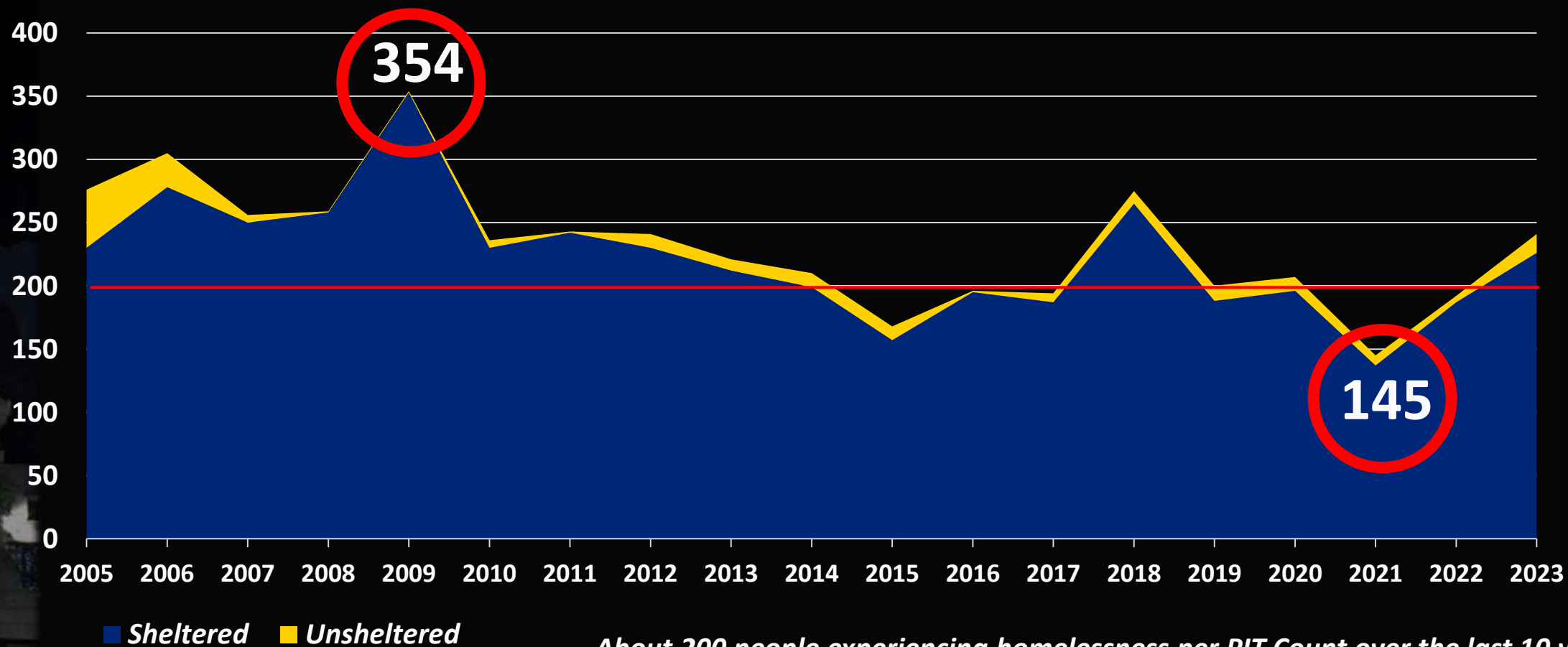


- ☐ Residing in Emergency Shelter (*sheltered*)
- ☐ Residing in Transitional Housing for People Experiencing Homelessness (*sheltered*)
- ☐ Residing in a Place Not Meant for Human Habitation (*unsheltered*)

These are the primary categories used in annual Point-in-Time (PIT) Counts.



January Point-in-Time Trends: Racine



About 200 people experiencing homelessness per PIT Count over the last 10 years.

Annual Counts



- ❑ Approximately 1,000 people experiencing homelessness in Racine annually
- ❑ 100 – 150 people *known to be* unsheltered annually (117 people in 2022)



Unsheltered Homelessness

A smaller sub-population of people experiencing homelessness in Racine

HEARTH DEFINITION (Unsheltered)

An individual or family with a primary nighttime residence that is a public or private place not designed for or ordinarily used as a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings...



FOCUS ON CURRENT LIVING SITUATION

Common Features of Unsheltered Locations



☐ COVER

☐ CONCEALMENT

☐ CONVENIENCE

☐ ACCESS

☐ SAFETY

Unsheltered locations often have meaning or purpose for their occupants.

Unsheltered Location Types in Racine

- ☐ Parking Garages
- ☐ Bus Shelters
- ☐ Behind / Next to Public or Commercial Buildings
- ☐ In Vehicles
- ☐ Benches / Public Spaces
- ☐ Pavilions
- ☐ Tents / Makeshift Shelters
- ☐ Abandoned / Unoccupied Buildings
- ☐ Laundromats / 24 Hour Businesses



Almost everyone we meet in an unsheltered location is staying in a place “they’re not supposed to stay.”

Why Street Outreach Services

The Unsheltered Population of Racine is:

- ☐ *Widely dispersed*
- ☐ *Unlikely to contact agencies or self-report their status or location*
- ☐ *Shelter Resistant*
- ☐ *Reluctant to accept services*



Street Outreach in Racine

Theory and practice of service on the streets



What is Street Outreach?

Services to people whose primary nighttime residence is a place not meant for human habitation, because they cannot, or choose not to, enter shelter.



Some Guiding Principles

- ❑ Meeting people where they are
- ❑ Respecting the worth and dignity of each person
- ❑ Change comes through relationship



Night Teams

☐NIGHT:

- All regular street outreach activity takes place at night,
- Occasional follow-up assignments during daylight hours

☐TEAMS:

- At least two people, but no more than 3 people (staff and/or volunteers)
- Have an experienced leader
- Have had orientation
- Have made a long-term commitment to outreach



Visiting People at their Primary Nighttime Residence

Street Outreach Process

- ☐ Plan
- ☐ Locate / Identify
- ☐ Approach
- ☐ Initiate Contact
- ☐ Offer Shelter / Basic Assistance
- ☐ Build Relationships
- ☐ Connect to Services



Planning a Shift

- ☐ Who
- ☐ What
- ☐ When
- ☐ Where
- ☐ Why
- ☐ How

Street outreach is very flexible, but not random or arbitrary.



Locating People Who Are Unsheltered

- ☐ By Vehicle
- ☐ On Foot
- ☐ Through Interviews
- ☐ Self-Reports
- ☐ 3rd Party Reports
- ☐ Checking Known Locations
- ☐ Exploration

Most of the people who are unsheltered in Racine are trying to avoid being found in their sleeping locations.



Identifying Possible Unsheltered Persons

- ☐ Sleeping in unsheltered location
- ☐ Multiple bags / belongings
- ☐ Cart to carry belongings
- ☐ Sitting / Walking without apparent purpose
- ☐ Rummaging through garbage cans, dumpsters, etc.
- ☐ Vehicle with belongings, windows covered, parked in private location, etc.



There are many people out on the streets at night. Only a few of them are unsheltered.

Making an Approach



Make all efforts to approach in a way that won't seem like a potential threat.

- ☐ Be Seen (*but no flashlights*)
- ☐ Be Heard (*but no idle chatting on approach*) – The “Call Out”
- ☐ Have Something in Hand
- ☐ Don't Crowd
- ☐ Don't Block the Person's Ability to Leave the Location
- ☐ Get to the Person's Level
- ☐ Keep Appropriate Space

Initiating Contact



Help the person come to a quick conclusion that we are who we say we are and that we are “safe.”

- ☐ Smiles and Friendly Greeting
- ☐ Who we are and our names
- ☐ What we are doing
- ☐ Using current living situation language to provide clarity and avoid stigma (people sleeping outside vs. homeless)
- ☐ Why we are talking to the person
- ☐ Who we are *not* (if needed) – e.g. not the police, etc.
- ☐ Offer some water or something
- ☐ Gauge response and go from there...

Offering Shelter and Basic Assistance

- ☐ Take to Shelter if they are able to go and choose to do so. (Doesn't usually happen)
- ☐ Provide Informational Brochure on Services in Racine
- ☐ Offer Basic Assistance (food, blanket, socks, water, hygiene products)

Basic assistance provides for needs, but one of its primary purposes is a vehicle for relationship building.



Building a Relationship of Trust

- ☐ Keep going back
- ☐ Confidentiality
- ☐ Follow the person's lead
- ☐ Keep to the principles

Show consistency, trustworthiness, and reliability and think long-term.



Connecting to Services

- ☐ Shelter
- ☐ PATH / Mental Health
- ☐ SOAR
- ☐ Coordinated Entry
- ☐ Subsidized Housing
- ☐ Main Stream Benefits

*Sometimes Days, Sometimes Weeks, Sometimes Months,
Sometimes Years, Sometimes Never – Keep Trying As Long As We Can...*



Staffing / Assigning Leads



- ☐ Who's on the streets now?
- ☐ Who seems ready for change?
- ☐ What can we do to encourage and facilitate change?
- ☐ Who has the best relationship with that person?
- ☐ The person with the best relationship takes the lead in change discussion. Others support.

Common Outreach Worker Challenges

❑ New Outreach Workers: “Speed Demons”

(Slow down. Listen More. Talk Less)

❑ 3 – 6 Months Street Service: “Plateauing”

(Work on relationship to service-connection conversions.)

❑ ‘Seasoned’ Outreach Workers: “Assumptions”

(Tonight might not be like any other night in the previously however many years.)

❑ All Outreach Workers: “Power Language”

(Hear what you are saying from the other person’s perspective.)





Conclusion

Wrapping this up

What surprised you about street outreach?

- ☐ “I thought it would be scary, but it wasn’t. The people we meet are friendly.”
- ☐ “I thought everyone would want to go to shelter, but hardly any of them did.”
- ☐ “A lot of the people we meet on street outreach don’t want any assistance at all.”
- ☐ “I was surprised how long it can take before someone agrees to sign up for housing (coordinated entry).”
- ☐ “People who call us usually aren’t unsheltered, but people who are unsheltered usually don’t call us.”



Keys to Successful Street Outreach



- ❑ A respectful and gentle, but persistent presence (just keep showing up, engaging, and listening as long as people will talk to the team)
- ❑ Continued learning and improvement in location and engagement skills as individuals and as a team.

Thank You!

Discussions or
Questions about
Street Outreach
in Racine





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“CUT FOR TIME”

Unused or edited slides cut from original version to meet time constraints.

Street Outreach in Racine: An Overview

1. Context

2. Street Outreach
Theory and
Practice

3. Conclusion and
Discussion

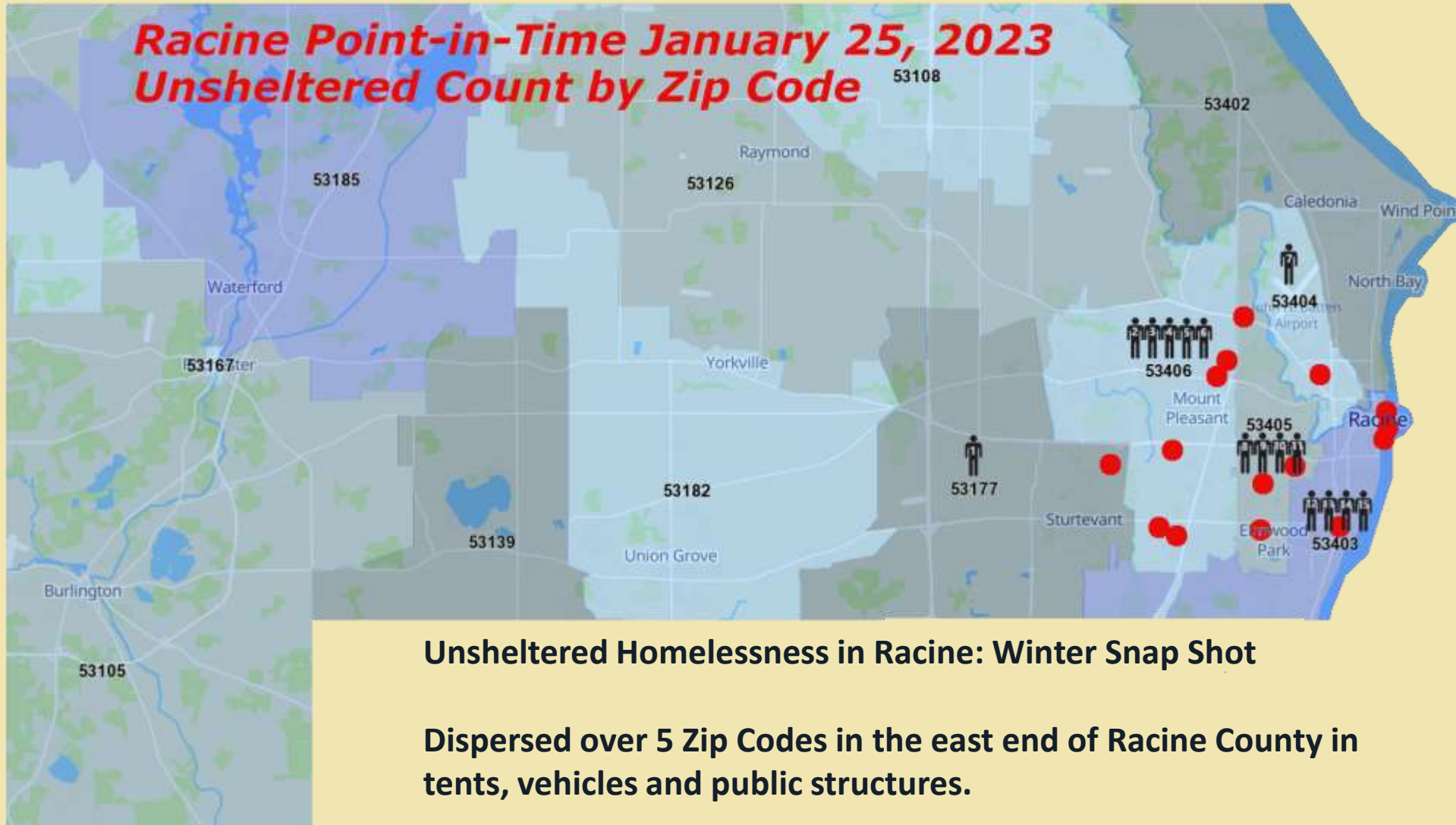


What we often hear...

- ☐ “I’m homeless.”
- ☐ “I have no place to stay.”
- ☐ “I am on the streets.”
- ☐ “I have no place to lay my head.”
- ☐ “I basically live in my car.”
- ☐ “I’m almost homeless.”
- ☐ “I stay here and there.”

These are all often also used as euphemisms for being “doubled up” (staying with friends or family).

Unsheltered Locations: PIT 2023



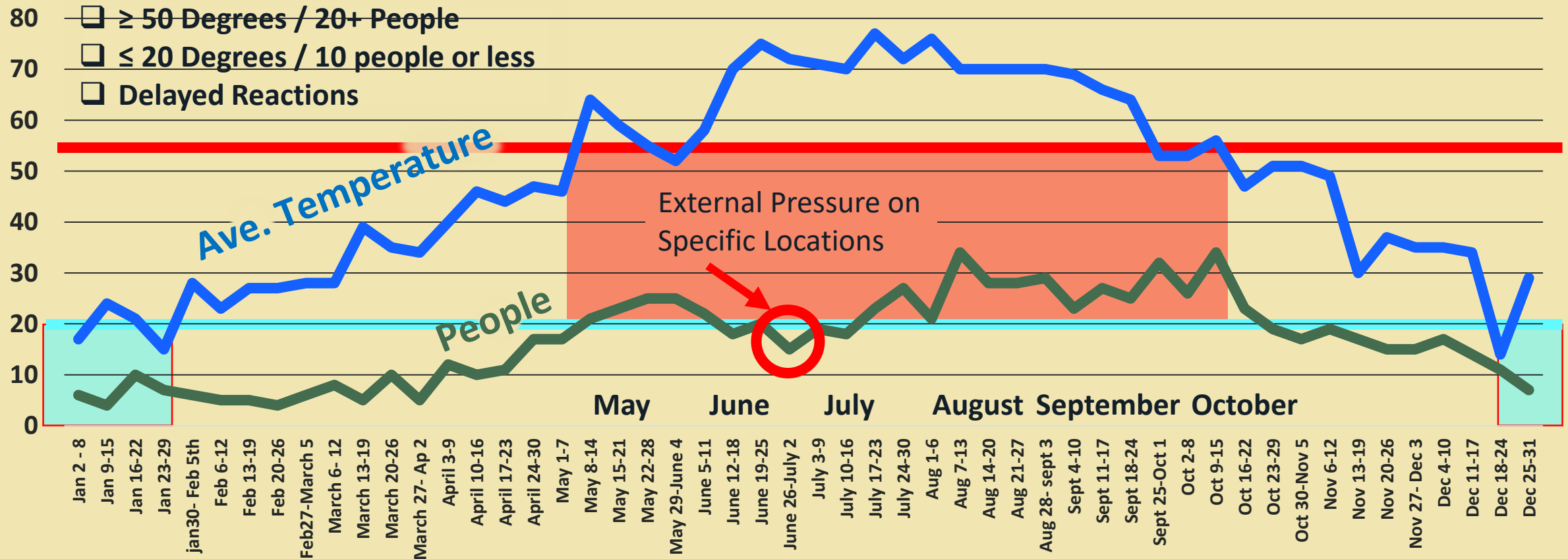
TYPES OF HOMELESSNESS

Transitional Homeless	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Crisis Driven<input type="checkbox"/> Usually Short Periods<input type="checkbox"/> Usually Don't Return to Homelessness
Episodic Homelessness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> In and Out of Homelessness<input type="checkbox"/> Varying Amounts of Frequency
Chronic Homelessness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Long Periods of Homelessness



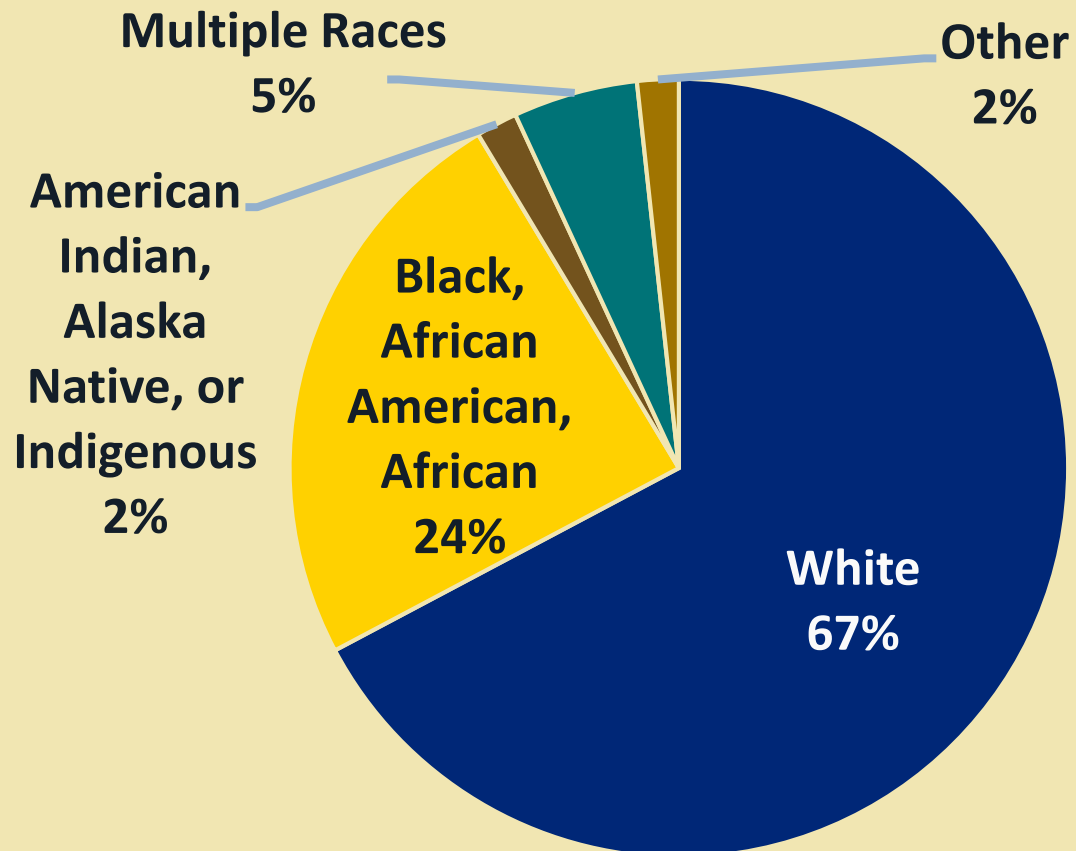
Seasonal Unsheltered Trends 2022

Individuals Contacted by Street Outreach and Average Temperature
Per Week in 2022 – RACINE, WI



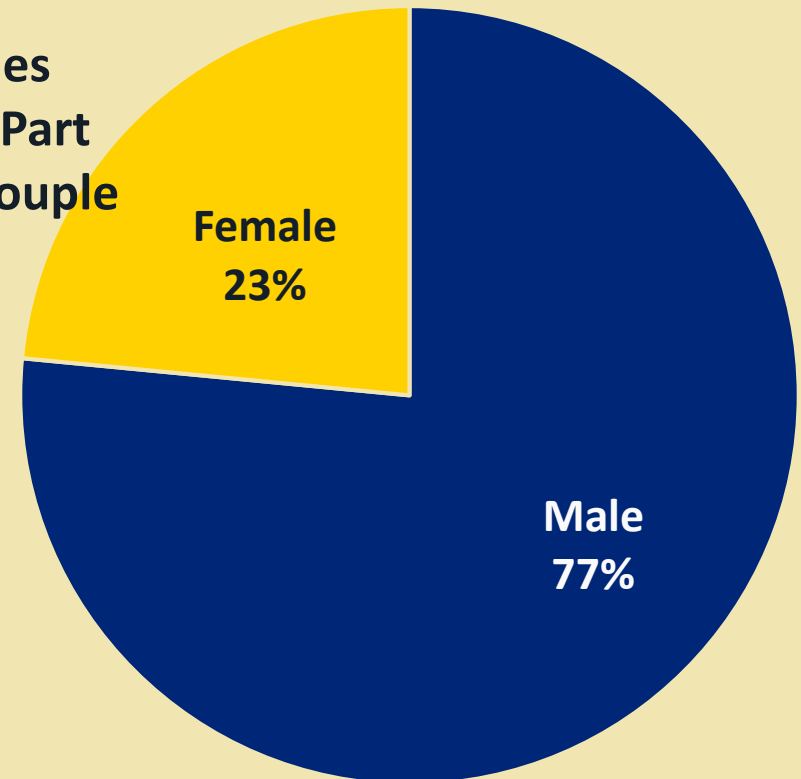
Unsheltered Demographics 2022

Unsheltered Persons by Race



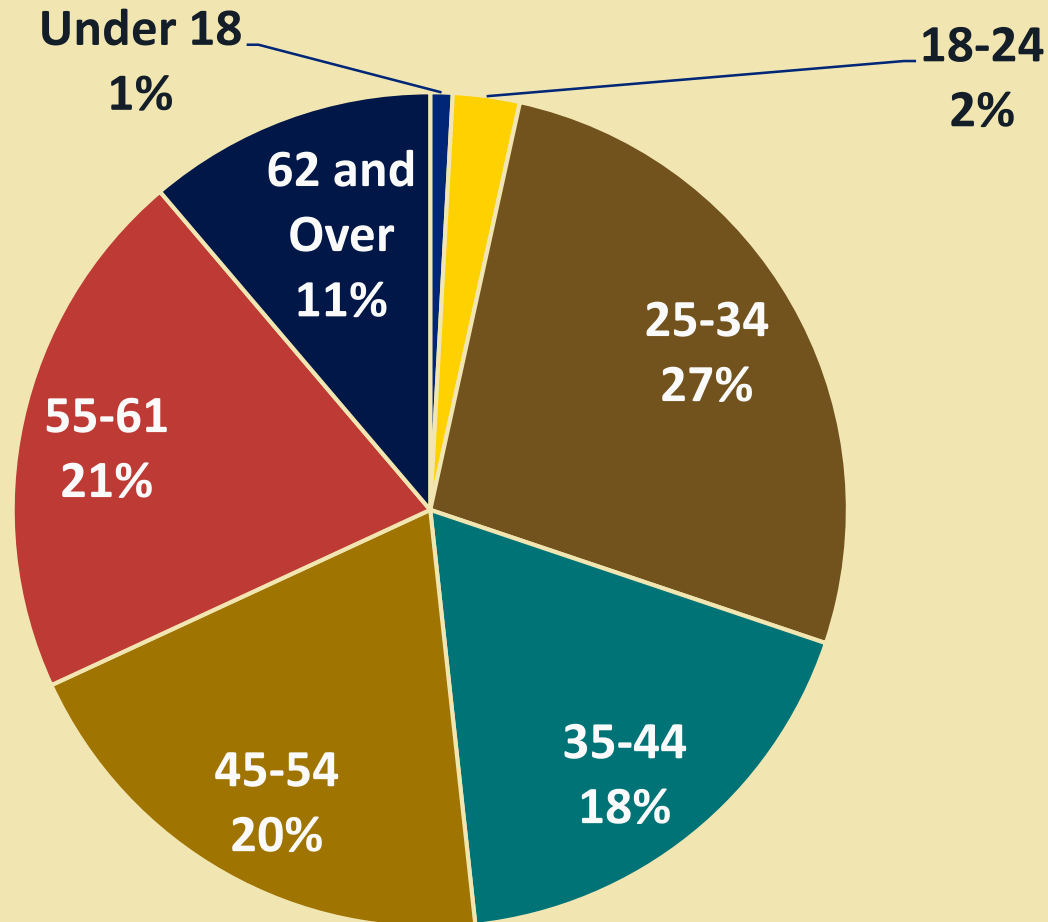
Unsheltered Persons by Gender

Most
Females
Were Part
of a Couple



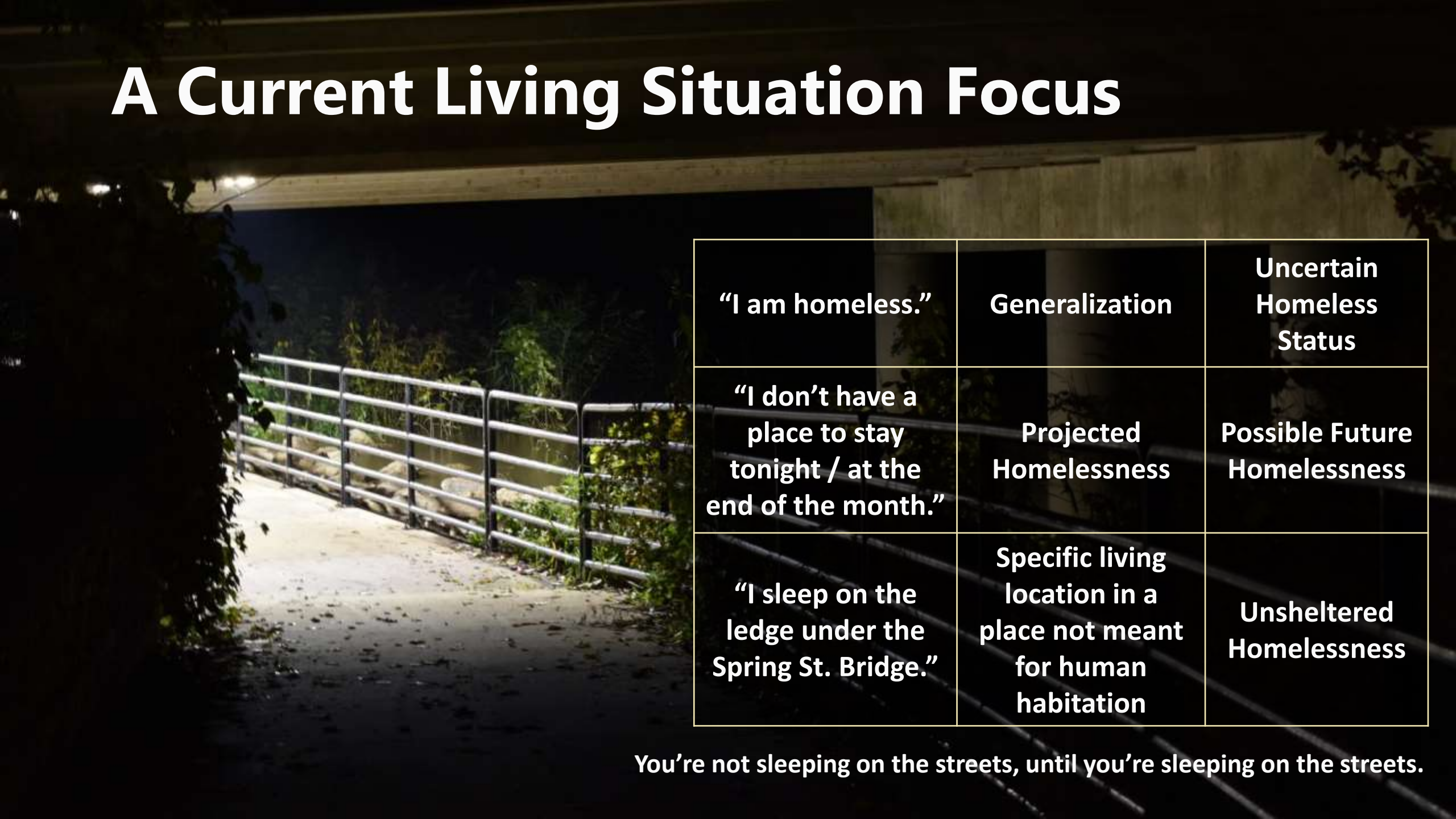
Age of Unsheltered Contacts 2022

Age of Unsheltered Contacts in 2022



- ☐ Families with Children with unsheltered contacts are very rare in Racine
- ☐ Unsheltered contact with unaccompanied minors is extremely rare (2 times since 2014)
- ☐ Not many youth (2022)
- ☐ More than 50% over 45 years old
- ☐ About 1/3 over 55 years old

A Current Living Situation Focus



"I am homeless."	Generalization	Uncertain Homeless Status
"I don't have a place to stay tonight / at the end of the month."	Projected Homelessness	Possible Future Homelessness
"I sleep on the ledge under the Spring St. Bridge."	Specific living location in a place not meant for human habitation	Unsheltered Homelessness

You're not sleeping on the streets, until you're sleeping on the streets.

Self-Reports vs. Street Outreach Contact

Situation	Call Volume	Seeking Assistance (Shelter or Housing)	Street Outreach Contact in Sleeping Location
Self-Report of Homelessness or Projected Homelessness	HIGH	ALWAYS	EXTREMELY RARE
Unsheltered Contact	EXTREMELY RARE	RARE	ALMOST ALWAYS

Street Outreach Process

- ☐ Plan
- ☐ Locate / Identify / Assess
- ☐ Approach / Contact
- ☐ Determine Status
- ☐ Offer Shelter / Basic Assistance
- ☐ Build Relationships
- ☐ Connect to Services



Assessing the Situation

- ☐ Determine whether the person is potentially unsheltered and whether to attempt contact.
- ☐ Don't stare, slow down, point at the person, or discuss the situation if the person can see or hear you.
- ☐ DECIDE to:
 - A) Commit to making an approach,
 - B) Move on without making an approach, or
 - C) Come back and check again later
- ☐ Any team member commits the team
- ☐ WHATEVER YOU DO:
DON'T BE A STALKER



People may be hyper vigilant and have safety concerns. We don't want to traumatize people while we're trying to decide whether or not to attempt making a street outreach contact

Making an Unsheltered Determination

- ☐ Is the person in an unsheltered sleeping location?
- ☐ If not, is there sufficient other evidence that the person is unsheltered?
- ☐ Professional Assessment:
 - a) Unsheltered,
 - b) Sheltered, or
 - c) Unable to Determine

“Do we count this person as an unsheltered contact tonight?”



Street Outreach Strategy

Trying to make the best use of time on the streets



Geographic Coverage Strategies



- ☐ Scheduling Coverage for Various Zones – minimum vs. priority coverage across the county
- ☐ Mapping out street outreach contacts for known locations
- ☐ Assigning teams to areas
- ☐ Scheduling exploration time in wooded areas

Balancing Shift Time

- ☐ Visiting the people we know to be unsheltered (serving and building relationships)
- ☐ Looking for People we haven't met yet (new contacts / exploration)



Team Composition

- ☐ Diversity: As much as possible on individual shift teams
- ☐ Language: Bilingual a significant benefit
- ☐ Cultural Humility: Respecting Differences
- ☐ Team Roles: Work as a team / varies per team.
- ☐ Knowledge of Services
- ☐ Not Afraid of the Dark



Applying Theory



Transtheoretical Model of Change
Prochaska & DiClemente

☐ What stage do we believe someone is in with regard to their unsheltered status?

☐ What is our best approach for this person? (e.g. Build Trust, Discuss Possibilities, Offer Options, Help Make Connections, etc.)

Pre-contemplation appears to be the most common in initial street outreach contacts. We listen for signs of contemplation and changing perspectives.

What street outreach is not (nuances)...

Shelter Entry Mechanism	We do take people into shelter and recommend shelter over the streets, but we are not “the way to get into shelter.” Street outreach doesn’t fix broken shelter entry mechanisms.
Food Service	We do provide some simple food during outreach, but we are not a meal service or food delivery service. (Meals aren’t the mission.)
Coordinated Entry Mechanism	We do put people who are unsheltered into coordinated entry, but we are not “the way to get on the housing list without going to shelter.” We only place someone on coordinated entry after multiple unsheltered contacts.
Gas Card / Bus Pass System	There are cases in which we will provide a gas card or a bus pass, but it is rare. We do not purchase or distribute gas cards.
Emergency Services	We do extra shifts during emergency weather conditions and we have called 911, Police Non-Emergency and coordinated with Mental Health Crisis Teams when needed, but... we are not an emergency service. If someone is in a life threatening situation, they should call emergency responders.
Motel Voucher Provider	We don’t provide this shelter service.